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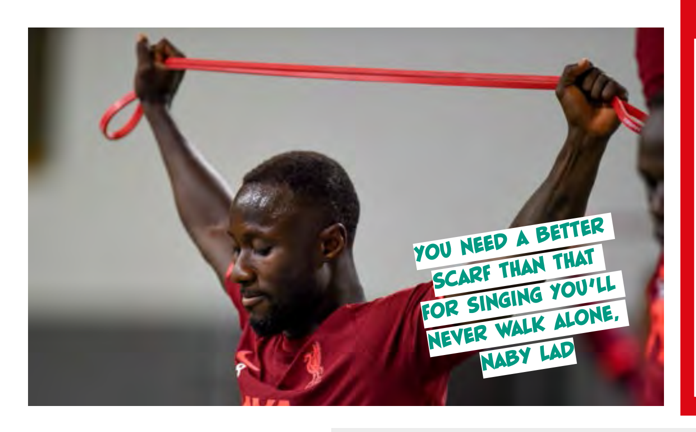
Reach Sport
Editor David Cottrell
Assistant Editor William Hughes
Writer Chris McLoughlin
Production Editor
Michael McGuinness
Design Colin Sumpter
Contributors Dave Ball, Ged Rea
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Marketing & Communications Manager Claire Brown
Printed by William Gibbons
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STAYING POWER

Two extended contracts and plenty of smiles. Local lad Trent Alexander-Arnold said it was "a no-brainer" to sign a new deal with the Reds. "The state the club is in and where I'm at in my career… I'm made up." Brazilian midfielder Fabinho revealed: "It's what I wanted – staying in this club, keep playing for Liverpool. Now this is official. These last three seasons I've been really happy here. I learned a lot with the manager, with all the staff, with the boys as well. We achieved things together and for me I think it's the best place to be."



CORNER TAKEN QUICKLY



Just like Barcelona in 2019, the page where you don't know what to expect...

LFC no5 SCRABBLE scores

WIJNALDUM (22)
AGGER (7)
BAROS (7)
WRIGHT (13)
STAUNTON (8)

OUR LADS HAVE COME FROM ALL OVER THE PLACE

Ibrahima Konate (Paris, France)



Ibou grew up in what's called the 11th arrondissement (administrative district) of Paris, known locally as Onzieme. It's a 40-minute drive from the Parc des Princes, Gini Wijnaldum's new gaff.

Situated on the right bank of the River Seine, it is one of the most densely-populated districts of any European city, and in recent years it's emerged as one of the trendiest too, with Rue Oberkampf the place to go for a bevvy or glass of rouge.

The Place de la Bastille and Rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine are full of fashionable cafes, restaurants, clubs, boutiques and galleries. We don't think they've got a Home & Bargain, though.

In 2009 the area had a population of 152,744 and provided more than 70,000 jobs. A few of them must be bakers as three of the best boulangeries in Paris are in Ibou's old neighbourhood. Up the breads.

Places of interest include the Cirque d'hiver, home to circuses and concerts, and the Eglise Saint-Ambroise, a 19th century church standing 68m high. That's three times higher than Anfield's Main Stand, but the choir aren't as noisy as ours.

Things you didn't need to know but might remember •

Phil Babb scored his only goal for Coventry against Liverpool and his only goal for Liverpool against Coventry.

BLAGGING IT

One of these three statements is true, the other two are made up. Can you suss it out?

• In 1962 the Liverpool team coach failed to turn up after a game at Carrow Road so the Norwich City goalie gave Bill Shankly a lift to the station while his players had to walk over a mile to get there.

• In 1976 Bob Paisley missed the start of a home game against Leicester City because he was watching the St Ledger Stakes at Doncaster Racecourse on a TV in his Anfield office and lost track of the time.

• In 1983 Joe Fagan turned down an endorsement with new LFC shirt sponsor Crown Paints after his wife Lil refused to have their front door painted red with yellow pinstripes.

Answer: Bill Shankly did indeed get a lift to Norwich Station from Canaries keeper Sandy Kennon after the team bus had failed to show up. The other two were blags.



RANDOM OLD CHANT OF THE MONTH



Mor Mor Mor,
Morientes, Morientes!
Mor Mor Mor,
Morientes, Morientes!



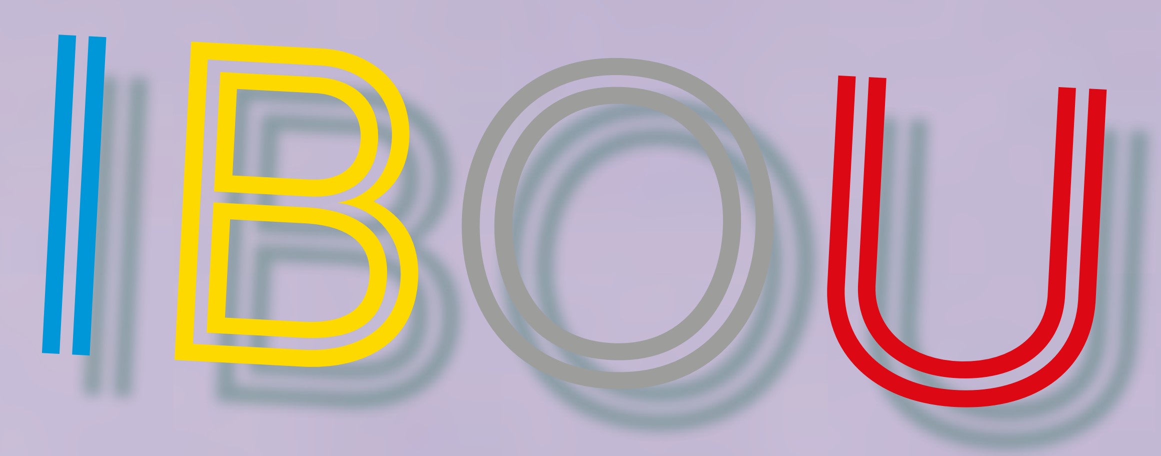
Ten opening-day three-pointers

12.09.20 Liverpool 4 Leeds United 3
09.08.19 Liverpool 4 Norwich City 1
12.08.18 Liverpool 4 West Ham United 0
14.08.16 Arsenal 3 Liverpool 4
09.08.15 Stoke City 0 Liverpool 1
17.08.14 Liverpool 2 Southampton 1
17.08.13 Liverpool 1 Stoke City 0
16.08.08 Sunderland 0 Liverpool 1
11.08.07 Aston Villa 1 Liverpool 2
18.08.02 Aston Villa 0 Liverpool 1

Things you didn't need to know but might remember •

The only opponent with the word 'Kop' in their name that Liverpool has ever played is IFK Norkopping in a friendly in Sweden in 1951. We won 1-0.


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Ibrahima Konate spoke of his desire to test himself in the Premier League when he gave his first interview to the club's official website during pre-season in Austria

Ibrahima, welcome to Liverpool. What are your impressions and is it everything you expected?

Hello, thank you so much. Yes, I am very happy to be here with the team. My first impressions, I am very happy because I work with great players and I know I will improve here and I will be better with time.

I'm very happy because we work together, everybody is happy and this is good.

You've come to Liverpool in great condition, but it was a very intense fitness camp wasn't it?

Sure, it was not easy, but before the pre-season I worked in Paris and on holidays and I prepared for the pre-season, so now I am ready for hard work.

We saw the video of you back home – it excited the fans in Liverpool!

I know! With the COVID situation it was difficult to come to Liverpool. I had this idea for a long time. It was good because it was Liverpool with the red colour and I did this video in three hours and it was very, very great for me, my friends and my family – and for the club too.

I did it alone but my brother and sister came to see, but they were not on the video.


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AXA



We saw you with the no5 shirt as well. Is that a special number to you? Is there a reason why you picked it?
No, I think it's an important number for this club. A great player had this number before me [Gini Wijnaldum]. I have not pressure but a little bit of pressure because I have to improve for the future. I hope I will do great things with this number.

You've trained with Virgil van Dijk, Joe Gomez and Joel Matip from the first week as well – are these players you hope you'll be able to learn from?
Yes, of course. I will learn [from] these players, but not just with these players – with every player on this team. It's just the start and with time it will be [a lot] better.

I've spoken with Van Dijk a little bit, Mane because he speaks French, Naby I knew him for a long time, Origi and Salah. I think I can speak with every player step-by-step, it will be good. All of the team are good guys.

Tell us about the conversation with Jürgen Klopp – what has he told you about the expectations for you this year?
We spoke before my signature but this will stay between us. I know I am very young but this is not important – I have to improve on the pitch and to work. If I am good, for the rest it is not important.

You didn't play for Leipzig against Liverpool in the Champions League last season, but were you dreaming then that perhaps one day you could be a Liverpool player?
No, I think not – but I was very sad not to play against Liverpool because it is one of the best teams in the world and when you are a football player you like to play in these games.

We lost and I could not help the team in this moment and I was sad. But now I am very happy because I am in this team.

What can Liverpool fans expect to see from you? Can you describe your style to them?
Yes, I am big, I am strong and I am not scared with the ball. I can score more with my foot than my head, it is a little bit strange – this is me!

Yes, I have this quality, but I have to work again and again and more and more and more for being a very good defender.

How excited are you about playing in the Premier League?
Of course, of course, of course – this is not a question! I have watched some Premier League games and


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everybody knows there is so much intensity, strong players.

This is difficult but I [will] love the challenge. The first game is coming very soon and we prepare for this game and the games in the Premier League and Champions League. And we will see...

You made your debut in the 30-minute friendly against VfB Stuttgart in Austria last month. How did you find that?
Yes, I was very happy. It was an unforgettable moment for me. Without our fans, but I was very, very happy. Just a little bit sad because we didn't win.

I was very happy with the team on the pitch, good communication with everybody. Step-by-step we will be better as that was the first time in pre-season.

When you make your Premier League debut, the fans will be back and hopefully the grounds will be full. How excited are you to see the fans?
I cannot explain how excited I am for this moment. It is too much to imagine this.

The fans will want to know what to call you – is there a nickname you like to be called?
Yes, 'Ibou' because when I was young, every time my mother would call me 'Ibou, Ibou'. When I was on the first day in Leipzig, she was with me and she would say every time, 'Hey, Ibou... Ibou... Ibou'.

[The coach] Ralf Rangnick asked, 'Why 'Ibou'?' So I said it was my nickname because every time my mum would call me that and my family too. He said, 'Okay, now it's 'Ibou' and afterwards everyone would call me it!







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"I FEEL I CAN GET INTO THE TEAM"

After winning the UEFA Champions League, Super Cup and FIFA Club World Cup in 2019, followed by the Premier League in 2020, Liverpool FC's Champions Wall didn't need engraving in 2021.

The Reds finished third in their defence of the Premier League title and exited the Champions League to Real Madrid in the last eight. Defeats on penalties to Arsenal in the Community Shield and the Carabao Cup were joined by an FA Cup loss at Manchester United.

While injuries and empty stadiums were taking a toll, Harvey Elliott was in East Lancashire with Blackburn Rovers. The 18-year-old spent most of the season on loan at Ewood Park, although he did play for Liverpool in the 7-2 Carabao Cup win at Lincoln City in September, claiming his first assist for the Reds.

Harvey subsequently made 42 appearances for Blackburn, contributing seven goals and eleven assists, and was rewarded for his tangible progress with a new Liverpool contract in July. So what next? Elliott, who signed for the Redmen from Fulham in 2019, has inevitably been linked with loan moves again, but this confident teenager has got a different target in mind.

"To get into the team," he replies when asked about it. "Last year's loan spell helped me a lot and I think I need to take the learning from that into this year. It's not going to come around and be given to me, I need to work hard for it.

"I am confident in myself. I feel I can get into the team, whether it's coming off the bench and making an impact.

"Whatever it is, I am confident in myself. That's the main goal really – just to be in and around the team and get minutes. Like I keep saying, it's down to me – I need to show the people I am ready, I need to show the gaffer I am ready – but I am certain I can do it."

Elliott's path to the team has some rather large obstacles in the way, not least Mo Salah who plays on the right of the front-three – the role Harvey is most familiar with.

Jürgen Klopp, however, has other ideas. The Reds boss has trialled the Surrey-born winger in a deeper, creative midfield role. Whether that proves to be a position he operates in during season 2021/22 remains to be seen, but Elliott is well-aware how challenging it will be to get into a Liverpool team stacked with quality.

"If you look at the team, it is superstars really. All fantastic players, so it is going to be hard, but in football you always have challenges and it's just how you deal with it, how you rise above them and how you better yourself.

"I am looking forward to the challenge, I am looking forward to the competitiveness and I am looking forward to hopefully getting minutes here and there."

Irrespective of how often he personally plays, Elliott can also see the bigger picture. With no silverware added to Liverpool's trophy cabinet in 2021 the lifelong Reds fan believes that will change in 2022 if the hard yards are put in by Klopp's talented squad.

"It's a big year. We're a big club wanting to achieve bigger things. The message is the same: just play our way, work hard, be the most hard-working team out there.

"The talent is there, so it will come. We just need to stay focused, stay patient and I am sure our time will come.

"I am sure we will get the success again. It's down to us, really. We just need to work hard, keep trying and keep going at it."

Elliott





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Salah

11 OPENING DAY GOALS

Mohamed Salah has scored on each of his four games for Liverpool played on the opening day of the Premier League season. His hat-trick in the thrilling 4-3 defeat of Leeds United at Anfield last season followed efforts against Norwich City in 2019/20, West Ham in 2018/19 and a goal on his Liverpool debut in the 3-3 draw against Watford in 2017/18.

The only other player to net on the opening day in four successive Premier League openers is Teddy Sheringham (1992/93 to 1995/96), so Mo will be looking to set a new record when the Reds visit Norwich City on 14 August.

The Egyptian king is also closing in on 100 Premier League goals for Liverpool – he goes into the new season with 95 from just 145 appearances.


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Matip

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TOWER OF POWER

One of the most pleasing aspects of the Reds' pre-season was the sight of defender Joel Matip back in action.

An ankle ligament injury sustained in January brought a premature end to his 2020/21 campaign, but the big centre-half is now back ahead of his sixth season with Liverpool. He is five games away from making 100 Premier League appearances for the club and is looking forward to the challenges ahead.

"It's nice to be back in training with the lads and to just be playing, playing [with] the ball and being active," Matip told the club website soon after the squad reported for pre-season training in Salzburg.

"I have a lot of sessions ahead of me but I am feeling good and I hope to continue like this. Training camps are always intense but for these moments we are here and these belong to pre-season and so we try to enjoy it.

"If you always train on your own it is quite hard for the head, but if you are back with the team and can play, and also make jokes, that always helps. You are really looking forward to the moment when you are in between them [again]. It's funny to be around them and you laugh a lot more than when you are on your own!"

Both manager Jürgen Klopp and his assistant Pep Lijnders have commented on how good the Reds' no32 has looked upon his return to training with Lijnders highlighting his importance at free-kicks.

"We had a big focus on our set-pieces," he explained after one of the sessions in Austria.

"In these training camps it's about not only about going back to basics, but also about putting in new ideas and making steps to evolve and become better.

"In each session, there are certain topics and this one was really about set-pieces and we played a game, 10 v 10, where each set-piece was repeated on half a pitch. It was really good.

"In these drills, we call Joel 'The Tower' – it is really not fair for the boys to have set-pieces against him because he clears everything!

"Joel was also the player of the tournament when we did a competition we call 'Finals' with 'street rules' in the evening session. The better you play, the longer your team stays on."

Matip lined up with Ben Davies for the opening half-hour friendly against Wacker Innsbruck before playing 45 minutes alongside Ibrahima Konate in the win over FSV Mainz on 23 July, then the first half against Hertha Berlin seven days later.

Matip, who turned 30 on the day of the Reds' return to Anfield for the friendly against Athletic Bilbao, says he is now fully-focused on what the 21/22 campaign can bring.

"[Last season] was not a really good period for me, with a lot of injuries, but I can only look forward and try to do my best and try to get in the best shape I can."


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Jota



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"THE TEAM WIL BE READY"

Diogo Jota is aiming for more Liverpool goals after sampling his first pre-season with the Reds.

The 2020/21 campaign was already underway when he completed the formalities of switch from Wolverhampton Wanderers last September. This time, after a break following his participation at Euro 2020 with Portugal, the Reds no20 linked up with his club again at their Austrian training camp last month.

"It's my first pre-season with Liverpool because last year when I arrived the season was already in the second game, I think," he told the club website. "I'm trying to learn this new way of work but I'm ready and it's football at the end of the day.

"It was a relaxed environment. We knew when we went to the pitches to work hard, that was the main part of our day. But then we had a lot of free time, so we could spend time together and that is good for the team. We were living there fit and with our confidence very high."

The 24-year-old scored 13 goals in 30 games in all competitions during his maiden season at Anfield including nine in 19 matches – just under one every two outings – in the Premier League. It was a return he was fairly happy with but one he hopes to improve upon in 2021/22.

"If you were going to say to me in the beginning 13 goals, maybe I would agree. But after that beginning, maybe you expect some more. It's football and you never know what's going to happen next. Now it's a new season and a new start. I'm ready and the team will be ready for that as well."

The experience of playing in front of big crowds with Portugal at the Euros this summer has also whetted his appetite for running out before capacity crowds at Anfield.

"I think it's huge. I remember the first time I came into the tunnel and I don't know how many, maybe 60,000 Hungary fans were there, and I was like, 'Wow, this is it, this is happening.' I feel like we missed this in England and every part of the world, and we are getting that back slowly. We saw in the Hungary team the way they run with people backing them was very useful for them and playing away felt like football is coming back again.

"I'm still really looking forward to playing at a full Anfield – hopefully that can happen this season. Of course when you get good things with a crowd there, it's always more positive."

Diogo hopes that the squad's rigorous pre-season preparations will put them in good stead for the months ahead as the Reds look to mount another title challenge.

"We will give it a go, of course like always," he says. "Last season wasn't very good for us – we still finished third but it's not what we wanted. We want to go and give a proper fight for the title."


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Beck



63 BECK IN BUSINESS

Welsh left-back Owen Beck signed a new contract in July and made an impression during Liverpool's pre-season games in Austria.

It was from the 18-year-old's cross that the Reds were awarded an early penalty that Divock Origi converted in the 1-1 draw against Wacker Innsbruck and he also created Liverpool's winner against FSV Mainz with another cross that Luca Kilian diverted into his own net.

"Class it as an assist!" he told LFC TV before admitting he is learning all the time from Andy Robertson and Kostas Tsimikas. "I can take a few things out of his [Robbo's] game and put them into mine and I'm learning a lot from Kostas."



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ALISSON ON SONG

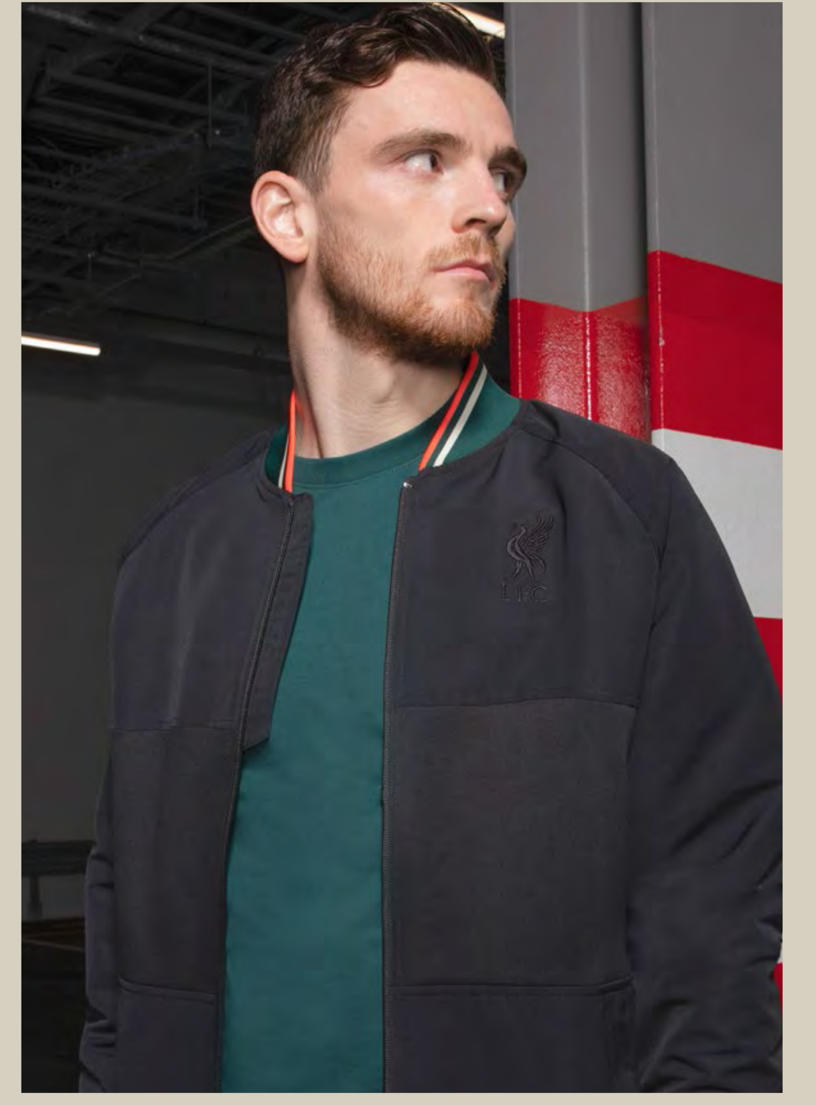
The Brazilian keeper played his part at both ends of the field during 2020/21 as the Reds defied a lengthy injury-list to secure a place in this season's UEFA Champions League tournament.

The final game of last term saw Alisson keep a clean-sheet as the Reds defeated Crystal Palace in a game which was also his 100th in the Premier League.

After being part of the Brazil squad that reached the final of the Copa America tournament, Liverpool's no1 is now raring to go again as he bids to help the Reds challenge for more silverware during his fourth season with the club.







2021/22

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THE OCTOPUS

Season 2020/21 was a breakthrough campaign for Caoimhin Kelleher. The 22-year-old goalkeeper made his Champions League debut against Ajax and his Premier League debut against Wolves in December, keeping clean-sheets in both Anfield games.

After a spell out through injury he completed a treble of debuts in June by making his first appearance for the Republic of Ireland against Hungary. He also added another clean-sheet to his debut collection that night, but rather than open a hotel laundry service with them he instead pledged his future to Liverpool by signing a new long-term contract.

"When I got the chance to sign for a few more years I was obviously delighted," he said. "It was a positive moment to commit my future to the club. It was a big year for me in terms of playing the first-team games and more important games – being thrown into the Champions League and Premier League games was big for my development and being able to handle that.

"It gave me a lot of confidence to try to push on, to try to keep pushing Ali because I can play at that kind of level as well and do well.

"I am looking forward, trying to keep pushing him and we'll see what happens."

Kelleher's progress continued during Liverpool's pre-season training camp in Austria. After recovering from a slight knee problem, the Cork-born keeper caught the eye with a string of impressive saves during a



finishing tournament. It earned him a new nickname from James Milner.

"Quive is like an octopus today," said the Reds midfielder. Virgil van Dijk was also impressed. "Quive is on flames," he said, "like Dida from the Brazil team."

A comparison to Brazil legend Claudio Taffarel was also made, but perhaps most importantly for Kelleher's career progression – and the battle between himself and Adrian to be Alisson's understudy this season – his impressive display was noted by the Liverpool management team.

"The player of the tournament was Kelleher," wrote assistant-boss Pep Lijnders in his daily training-camp diary on liverpoolfc.com.

"His shot-stopping and speed reactions were just insane. It shows that a goalkeeper can win you tournaments. There was some swearing from the older players towards him!"

Despite the relentless shots – and occasional profanities – flying his way, the young Irishman says the challenge of trying to stop his team-mates from scoring is fun and believes it is helping his development.

"I quite enjoy it, to be fair. It's a good challenge. There's a lot of good finishers in the team so I try to keep as many out as I can. It's a good challenge and it's fun.

"I think it most replicates the game as well and there are some of the best finishers in the world probably, so it's a great challenge for me and it keeps me sharp."




LFC

Mane 10



MANE'S MATE YAYA

Heard the one about the reigning African Footballer of the Year inviting the four-times African Footballer of the Year to watch himself train with the twice African Footballer of the Year?

That's precisely what happened at Liverpool's summer training camp when Yaya Toure paid a visit to see Sadio Mane and Mo Salah being put through their paces in Saalfelden.

Not many Manchester City legends would be granted permission by Jürgen Klopp to watch a Liverpool training session, but Toure – African Footballer of the Year in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 – is a hugely popular figure in the game who transcends rivalries.

Yaya may not have played for the greatest football club in the world like his brother Kolo, who made 24 of his 71 appearances for the Reds under Klopp's management during season 2015/16, but his friendship with Mane led to the former Ivory Coast international – now an assistant-coach with Russia's Akhmat Grozny – taking in a Liverpool training session.

"I said, 'Yaya, do you think it is the best idea to come to watch our training?'" smiled Mane when asked by LFC TV about Toure's visit. "He said, 'My friend, I'm coming there! Just ask your boss!'

"He is a very, very good guy and I have known him since 2004. He's a good friend of mine so we always keep in touch and when he asked me if I can ask the boss whether he can come to watch training I said, 'With pleasure'.

"I think the boss was happy to have Yaya with us to watch training and learn something because I wish him all the best. He wants to be a manager in the future and all the boys were happy to see him, to have a quick conversation with him and have a little bit of a talk about City and Liverpool. It was nice to meet him again."

With the award for the 2020 African Footballer of the Year yet to be announced, Mane remains the title-holder. He won the prestigious honour in 2019 following Salah's back-to-back successes in 2017 and 2018, but by his own admission the Senegalese international wasn't at his best during season 2020/21 despite scoring 16 goals.

Mane believes that having a month-long summer break for the first time since he joined Liverpool in 2016 will help him to rediscover his best form and also reckons the Reds are looking sharp as they head into the new campaign.

"It was not my best season, which I know. Like I always said, it can happen in football but I think it won't be the same season. For sure, I am more ready – mentally, physically, everything – so I think it will be for myself an exciting season.

"I think it's always important as a player to have a break because I can say since I came to Liverpool this was the first time I have had four weeks or more holidays, so I think that sometimes helps a lot. I am not complaining about having one week or two weeks' holiday, but I think it's always better for us to have this long period of holiday.

"Honestly, everybody, and myself for sure, feels more ready. I always say tiredness is here [points to his head] and obviously you have to be mentally strong to cope with it, but at the same time I think resting is the best. I think now we have all rested properly so this is another advantage for us. We are looking to be ready for the season now."



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KOSTAS ON COURSE

After only completing 90 minutes once during an injury-hit first season at Liverpool, defender Kostas Tsimikas is feeling fresh going into the new campaign.

"I want to start this season," says the Greek international left-back. "The first six months were very difficult for me because I had COVID and two injuries, but the second half of the year was very good and I trained very hard in coming back from the injuries. Now I am more ready and in good shape to give everything for the team and help them to achieve our goals.

"My target for the season is to stay healthy, first of all, and afterwards to play more games and help my team."



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Koumetio

BILLY'S IDOL

A member of Liverpool's 2021 FA Youth Cup final team, 18-year-old centre-back Billy Koumetio made a new friend during pre-season.

"Me and Konate, we speak a lot. I love him, he's a great man but also a great player. He's very good on the ball, attacking and defending. We are talking a lot. He's settled in perfectly."

Whether the two Frenchmen partner each other in a first-team game for LFC remains to be seen, but Koumetio says he is learning from his team-mates: "They are all different so you can pick some qualities off each of them. Not only Virgil but also Joel, Joe, Konate, Rhys, Nat and Ben. They are great lads and big players."



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HITTING THE GROUND RUNNING – AGAIN!

James Milner never fails to surprise with his levels of fitness, endurance and raw energy.

Liverpool's vice-captain has just completed the 20th pre-season of his professional career and is now aiming to help the Reds challenge for honours again after a 2020/21 season that saw the team hit hard by injuries.

"You work in the off-season yourself, but there's nothing that prepares you for the session-on-session, day-on-day [routine]," he told liverpoolfc.com. "It was a long camp, so I wasn't looking too far ahead and counting off the days if you like – I was counting off the sessions.

"We had a lot of doubles [sessions] and things like that, so get through the morning session, refuel and go again.

"It's pretty short-term thinking, but each session was very important and the coaches are obviously great working on everything they need to: mixing it up [and] keeping it interesting, but with a high emphasis on the things that we want to improve and take into this year.

"So it was obviously important that we're getting that message and doing the work now so it becomes second-nature to us and it's not something that needs to be asked for or something that we're consciously thinking about once it comes to game day, you automatically just do it."

He believes the month-long training camp in Austria was perfect for integrating some of the club's younger players as well as newcomer Ibrahima Konate.

"Obviously we were away a long time but being away for a month is probably the equivalent of being back at the AXA, coming in and out every day, six months really, with the amount of time that you spend together. So that's what these camps are perfect for and he [Konate] is a very good player and he's still young as well so he'll get better and better with the help from the manager and the coaches but also the players around him."

Milner made his 250th appearance for Liverpool when he came off the bench in the 2-0 win against Crystal Palace in May, a victory which secured a top-three Premier League finish and qualification for the UEFA Champions League.

The 35-year-old currently sits fifth in the all-time list of Premier League appearances with 564. Another nine will see him move above ex-Red David James. However, in his two decades in the professional game, the Reds no7 has learned the value of not looking too far ahead.

"I think at this moment in time it's about the process and not looking too far ahead. We know what we want to achieve in the season, we know what's expected, we want to win trophies – that's obviously always the aim.

"I'm pretty sure we'll have learned more last season than we will have done in the two or three seasons before it and that's a positive.

"A big positive is how we finished the season and how we finished up and hopefully we can take that momentum from last year. But at the moment it's just about getting our rhythm and hitting the ground running."

Milner





Oxlade-Chamberlain

15



IN THE BEST PLACE POSSIBLE

When you boast a skill-set as varied as Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, it opens up a whole host of options to your manager. This pre-season has seen Liverpool's versatile no15 deployed in a different position as a deeper-lying forward.

With Roberto Firmino missing the bulk of the training camp in Austria after being given time-off to recover from his summer exploits with Brazil at the Copa America, the Ox was given the opportunity to try out the no9 role.

He told the club's official website: "That sort of role that Bobby plays, the false nine, I think he's the best in the business at it for us and in attacking situations he makes it so much easier for Mo and Sadio or Diogo, just dropping deep and leaving spaces in behind for them and then attracting people, and then defensively as well.

"But the way that role is played, it's almost similar to a no10, attacking-midfield role because you drop quite deep so in that sense I find it quite natural. I feel like I can run in behind from there as well and get in and around the box, and you get opportunities to shoot and score.

"So I don't mind doing that role – but you know, I've still got my head more fixed on the midfield situation. But if I need to fill in and do that, then I'm confident that I can do that as well."

Assistant-manager Pep Lijnders revealed that Oxlade-Chamberlain had scored a few 'worldies' during the squad's training sessions in Austria, something which delighted the ex-Arsenal man.

"That's obviously what I want to keep trying to do from midfield or attacking roles, just trying to shoot from outside the box. I know I'm capable of doing it. Obviously they won't all go in, but I've been working on that again.

"But there's been a few, to be honest. That's something that is part of my game and I need to keep doing."

Oxlade-Chamberlain turns 28 the day after the Premier League curtain-raiser at Carrow Road. He believes the month-long camp in Austria was the perfect opportunity for members of the squad to stake their claims for a regular place in Jürgen Klopp's side.

"Of course, but I think that's the same for everyone that was there from the start. I've had a lot of pre-seasons in the past where I've been one of the later ones to return and you are kind of playing a bit of catch-up and trying to get back in as quick as you can.

"So we definitely had a nice long period, I'd say, to build back up and get fit. The longer the pre-season, technically by the time the season comes around the fitter you'll be, so it's an opportunity for me – just like the rest of the lads – to of course work hard, impress and just put ourselves in the best place individually and as a team to be ready for when the first day of the season comes."



..."NO WAY!"

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WALK ON



REDS' LEADING MAN

Despite the heartache of England's Euro 2020 final defeat by Italy in the national stadium, Jordan Henderson enjoyed a productive summer.

He played his part in helping the Three Lions reach their first major tournament final in 55 years and also ended his long wait for a senior England goal following his header in the quarter-final romp against Ukraine.

Now the Liverpool captain is looking forward to leading the Reds into another Premier League campaign with the 31-year-old eyeing a couple of early-season milestones.

Hendo is eight games away from joining an elite band of players to make 400 appearances for Liverpool [just 26 have achieved it to date] and he is also 10 league games away from playing 300 for the Reds in the Premier League.


Gomez
Van Dijk
12
standard
chartered
captain
4



12

THE BOYS ARE BACK

4

It began as just a murmur in the 14th minute. Then it gathered pace among the Liverpool supporters inside the Tivoli Stadium. The Reds may have been playing in front of their very eyes, but it was the prospect of seeing Virgil van Dijk make his long-awaited comeback that was on their minds.

"He's our centre-half, he's our number four," they sang. "Watch him defend, and we watch him score! He'll pass the ball, calm as you like. He's Virgil van Dijk, he's Virgil van Dijk."

An hour or so later, in the 69th minute of an entertaining 4-3 defeat to Hertha BSC, came the moment every Kopite had been waiting nine months for. Virgil van Dijk emerged on the touchline, ready to come on. And he wasn't alone. Ain't nobody like Joe Gomez, and having been out for eight months himself through injury it was fitting that Liverpool's central defensive duo returned together.

When the moment came they gave each other a high-five followed by a hug on the touchline before running on – Van Dijk a second or two before Gomez – to play football for Liverpool FC again. The cheers in the stands were so loud you'd have thought the Reds had just scored. The joy and relief at witnessing such an important moment was palpable.

It wasn't a fairytale return. Gomez was booked for a foul and Van Dijk, who wore the captain's armband and was involved in Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain's goal, missed an attempted tackle as Steven Jovetic scored what proved to be the winner. But it didn't matter – the boys were back.

Virgil missed 45 of Liverpool's 53 games last season due to the serious knee injury he suffered against Everton in October. Gomez missed 39 of Liverpool's 53 games last season due to the serious knee injury he suffered while training with England in November. Both missed Euro 2020.

So when the pair took to social media to give their post-match reactions to finally getting back on a football pitch, the emotion in their posts was unmistakeable and understandable.

"285 days ago, I started on a journey back towards playing," wrote Van Dijk. "It's hard to express how I am feeling, but it's important to me that I say I feel blessed to have had the support of so many incredible people.

"The surgeon, my physios, coaches and staff who have been with me in my corner since day one. My team-mates for giving me energy and keeping my head up. The fans for their love, support and encouragement. And most of all, my family because without them, I'd be nothing. Thank you.

"The work doesn't stop now. It's only just starting. We keep going!"

Fellow centre-back Joe, who got married in July, was also thankful to those who have helped him during his lengthy rehab. "It's hard to put into words my gratitude at having been able to put on the red shirt again," he wrote. "It's been a period that has severely tested me physically and emotionally. One that I don't feel I would have come through without the support of those around me.

"A special thanks to the phenomenal surgeon, physios and rehab specialists who've guided me through this – each one of them knows how grateful I am.

"Big love to all the LFC family for your support and words of encouragement; that's staff and fans. And most importantly to my wife and family, who are my reason to do it all. I'm thankful. Onwards and upwards."

IT'S KICKING OFF

How much can you remember about LFC opening days over recent years? These 50 questions should put you to the test



ELEVEN YEARS AGO

1 Who was dismissed on his Anfield league debut, against Arsenal, on the opening day of the 2010/11 season?

2 Who took charge of the Reds in a league game for the first time that day?

3 Which Liverpool defender said of that fixture: "I remember most of the things about the Arsenal game until I got the kick in the head – after that it's just a blank. I struggled a bit with the concussion and it's only in the last few days that I have started feeling normal again."

4 Whose late own-goal gave the Gunners a point?

5 Which South American provided the assist for David Ngog's goal that day (above) in what was his last appearance for the Reds?



JK'S OPENING DAY

6 Who were the Reds' opponents when Jürgen Klopp took charge of a game on the opening day of a Premier League season for the first time?

7 Can you name the three players who made their PL debuts for the Reds that day (a point for each)?

8 Simon Mignolet saved a first-half penalty from which player?

9 Liverpool won the game 4-3 – but who scored twice for the Reds?

10 None of the starting back-four that day are still with Liverpool – can you name them (point for each)?

TOP OF THE KLOPPS

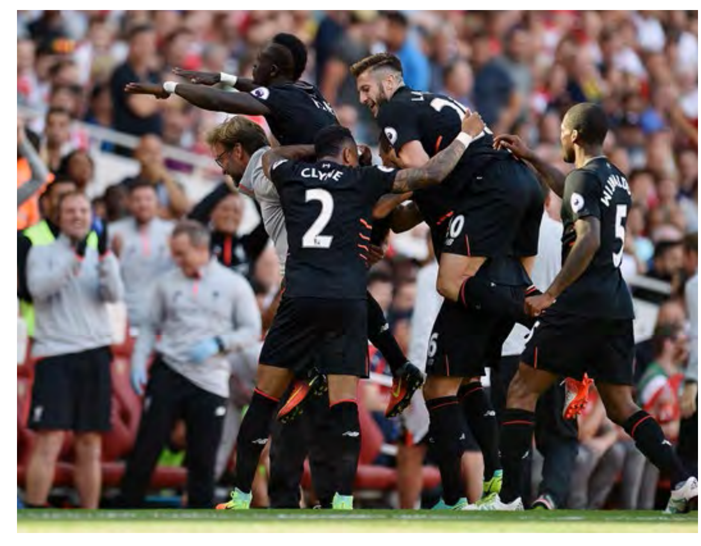
11 Jürgen Klopp has managed Liverpool in five opening-day games so far – but how many goals have been scored in those fixtures: (a) nine (b) 19, or (c) 29?

12 Liverpool's biggest win in those games was 4-0 at home to whom in August 2018?

13 Which debutant goalkeeper kept a clean-sheet that day?

14 Mohamed Salah has scored in all four of his opening-day outings for the Reds so far – how many goals has he scored in total: (a) two (b) four, or (c) six?

15 And how many opening-day goals has Sadio Mane scored for Liverpool: (a) three (b) four, or (c) five?





HENDO'S BOW

16 Jordan Henderson made his PL debut for the Reds on the opening day of the 2011/12 season against which club?

17 Hendo was one of four Liverpool debutants that day, but can you name the other three – a left-back, left winger and midfielder (point for each)?

18 Who missed a seventh-minute penalty for Liverpool but opened the scoring five minutes later?

19 Who was skipper that day and so the first man to captain a Reds team featuring Hendo in a Premier League game?

20 Which member of the visiting side that day became a Liverpool player in 2013?

CLASS OF 2013/14

21 On the opening day of the 2013/14 season Liverpool beat Stoke City 1-0 at Anfield – which debutant supplied the assist for Daniel Sturridge's winner?

22 Who managed the Potters that afternoon?

23 Reds debutant keeper Simon Mignolet saved a late penalty from whom to preserve our 1-0 advantage?

24 Which ex-Liverpool striker started for Stoke?

25 And which two ex-Reds came on as substitutes (point for each)?



MILNER'S MAIDEN MATCH

26 James Milner made his first PL appearance for Liverpool at which ground on the opening day of the 2015/16 season?

27 Who scored Liverpool's winning goal that day?

28 Which other debutant provided the assist for the goal?

29 Which member of the current squad came off the bench to make his LFC debut that day?

30 Name the two former Reds in the hosts' starting eleven (point for each)?





AWAY DAYS

31 Who were the opponents the last time the Reds kicked off a Premier League season away from home, in August 2017?

32 What was the score that afternoon?

33 Who scored on his Liverpool debut that day?

34 Who netted from the penalty spot for the Reds?

35 Who grabbed a dramatic last minute goal for the hosts?

YELLOW FEVER

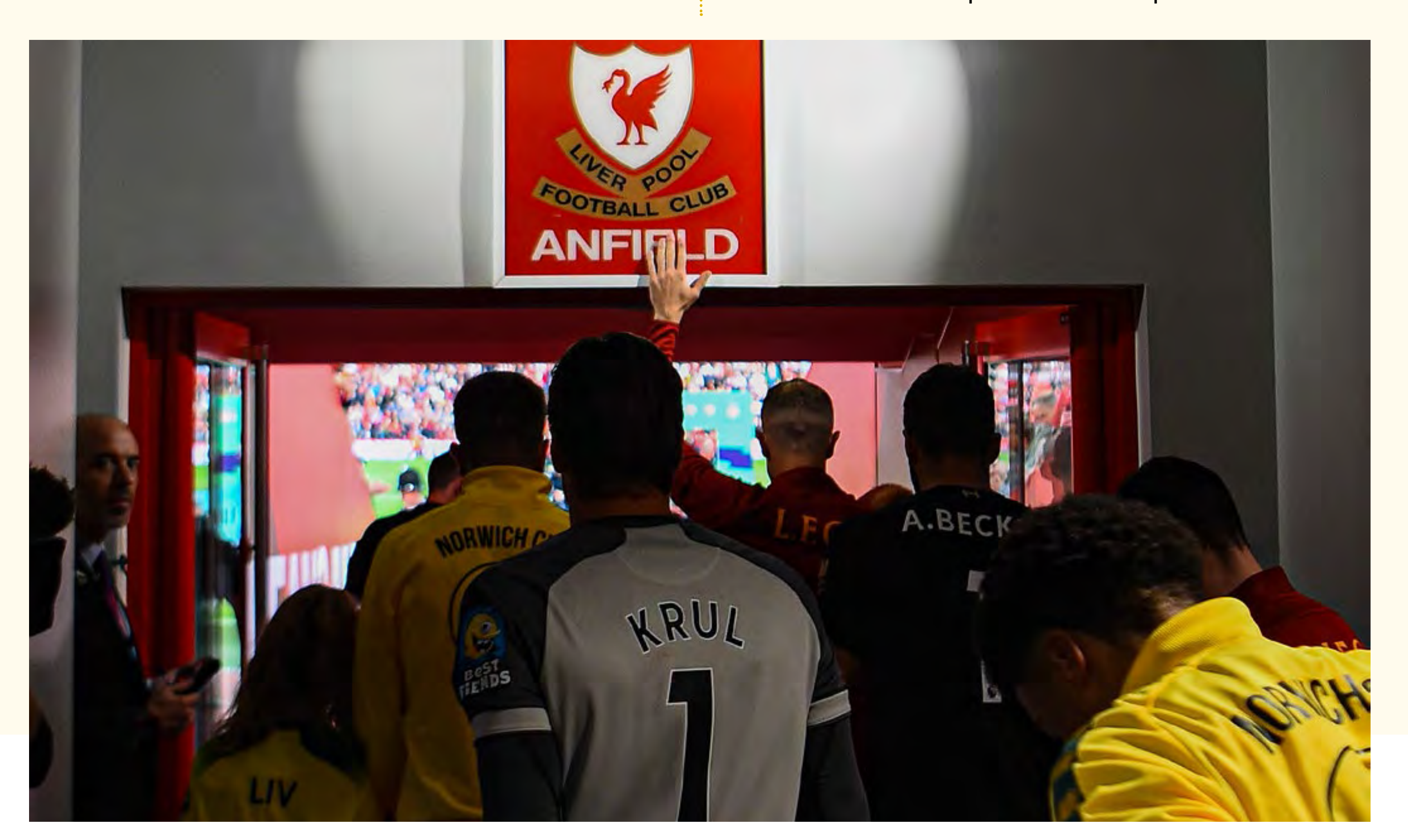
36 The Reds have played Norwich City on the opening day of the season once before, in 2019 – but on which day of the week did that Anfield clash take place?

37 What was the half-time score?

38 Whose unfortunate own-goal put the Reds ahead after seven minutes?

39 Who were Liverpool's other goalscorers (point for each)?

40 Who made his Liverpool debut as an unexpected substitute?





LAST TIME OUT

41 Can you name the Leeds United defender punished for handball for Mo Salah's opening penalty in September 2020?

42 Who scored Leeds' first equaliser with a fine solo effort?

43 Other than Salah, which other Red found the target that day?

44 Which Leeds midfielder made it 3-3 midway through the second half?

45 And which Red was fouled to earn Liverpool their late penalty from which Salah completed his hat-trick?

AND FINALLY

46 Between them, how many assists have full-backs Trent Alexander-Arnold and Andy Robertson (right) supplied on their opening-day games for the Reds to date?

47 Roberto Firmino has scored in how many games on the first day of the PL season?

48 And how many assists has the Brazilian provided in his opening-day fixtures?

49 How many times has Jordan Henderson captained Liverpool in the season's first PL game?

50 Hendo was one of five Englishmen in the starting XI for the 2-1 win against Southampton at Anfield in 2014/15 – can you name the others (point for each)?



ANSWERS

ELEVEN YEARS AGO: 1. Joe Cole; 2. Roy Hodgson; 3. Daniel Agger; 4. Pepe Reina; 5. Javier Mascherano.

JK'S OPENING DAY: 6. Arsenal in August 2016; 7. Sadio Mane, Ragnar Klavan and Georginio Wijnaldum; 8 Theo Walcott; 9. Philippe Coutinho; 10. Nathaniel Clyne, Dejan Lovren, Ragnar Klavan and Alberto Moreno.

TOP OF THE KLOPPS: 11. (c) 29 goals; 12. West Ham United; 13. Alisson Becker; 14. (c) six; 15. (b) four.

HENDO'S BOW: 16. Sunderland; 17. Jose Enrique, Stewart Downing and Charlie Adam; 18. Luis Suarez; 19. Jamie Carragher; 20 Simon Mignolet.

CLASS OF 2013/14: 21. Iago Aspas; 22. Mark Hughes; 23. Jon Walters; 24. Peter Crouch; 25. Jermaine Pennant and Charlie Adam.

MILNER'S MAIDEN MATCH: 26. Britannia Stadium (Stoke City); 27. Philippe Coutinho; 28. Joe Gomez; 29. Roberto Firmino; 30. Glen Johnson and Charlie Adam – again!

AWAY DAYS: 31. Watford; 32. It finished 3-3; 33. Mohamed Salah; 34. Roberto Firmino; 35. Miguel Britos.

YELLOW FEVER: 36. Friday night; 37. It was 4-0; 38. Grant Hanley; 39.Mohamed Salah, Virgil van Dijk and Divock Origi; 40 Adrian.

LAST TIME OUT: 41. Robin Koch; 42. Jack Harrison; 43. Virgil van Dijk; 44. Mateusz Klich; 45. Fabinho.

AND FINALLY: 46. Three; 47. One; 48. Three; 49. Five – he missed the 2018/19 curtain-raiser through injury: 50. Steven Gerrard, Glen Johnson, Raheem Sterling and Daniel Sturridge.

HOW DID YOU SCORE?

0-30 points: back to the drawing board – you need to put in some serious early-season training.
31-55 points: impressive stuff – you're set for a solid campaign.
56 – 64 points: the stuff of champions – you're even sharper than Mo Salah on the opening day!



GREAT SCOTT

Celebrating a century of Liverpool FC's 'Untouchables' by reflecting upon one of the club's goalkeeping greats, Elisha Scott

Words: William Hughes



One hundred years ago this summer Liverpool FC were preparing for a spell which would see them dominate English football for two seasons.

Under the management of David Ashworth and then Matt McQueen, the Reds won back-to-back top-flight titles with a team which would be nicknamed 'The Untouchables'.

In goal for all but three of those 84 league games was the imperious Elisha Scott.

The Northern Ireland international is regarded by some as the greatest goalkeeper ever to guard the Liverpool net after an incredible 21 years on Merseyside which saw him amass nearly 500 appearances.

Born in Belfast, he seemed set to follow in the footsteps of his older brother Billy who was a stopper for Everton and Ireland and recommended young Elisha to the hierarchy at Goodison Park.

However, the Toffees passed up the opportunity and when Billy then tipped off Anfield chairman John McKenna, the Reds did not hesitate in making their move for the 17-year-old in September 1912.

The rookie made his debut at Newcastle United on the first day of 1913, keeping a clean-sheet and producing such a positive performance that the Magpies even offered £1,000 for the teenager there and then.

Liverpool's secretary-manager Tom Watson refused the bid and reassured the youngster that his future was at Anfield. Towards the end of the 1914/15 season Scott enjoyed an extended run as the Reds' first-choice keeper.

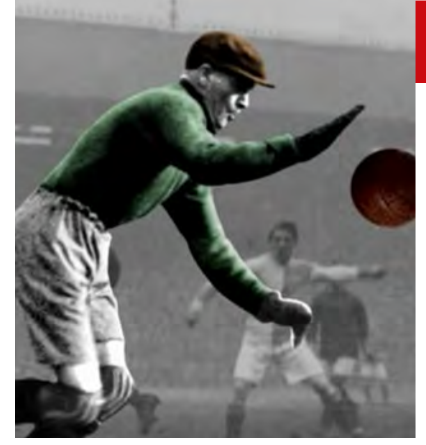
The advent of World War One interrupted his progress but as the 1920s dawned he quickly earned a reputation as one of the finest custodians around.

One reporter wrote: "He has the eye of an eagle, the swift movement of a panther when flinging himself at a shot, and the clutch of a vice when gripping the ball."

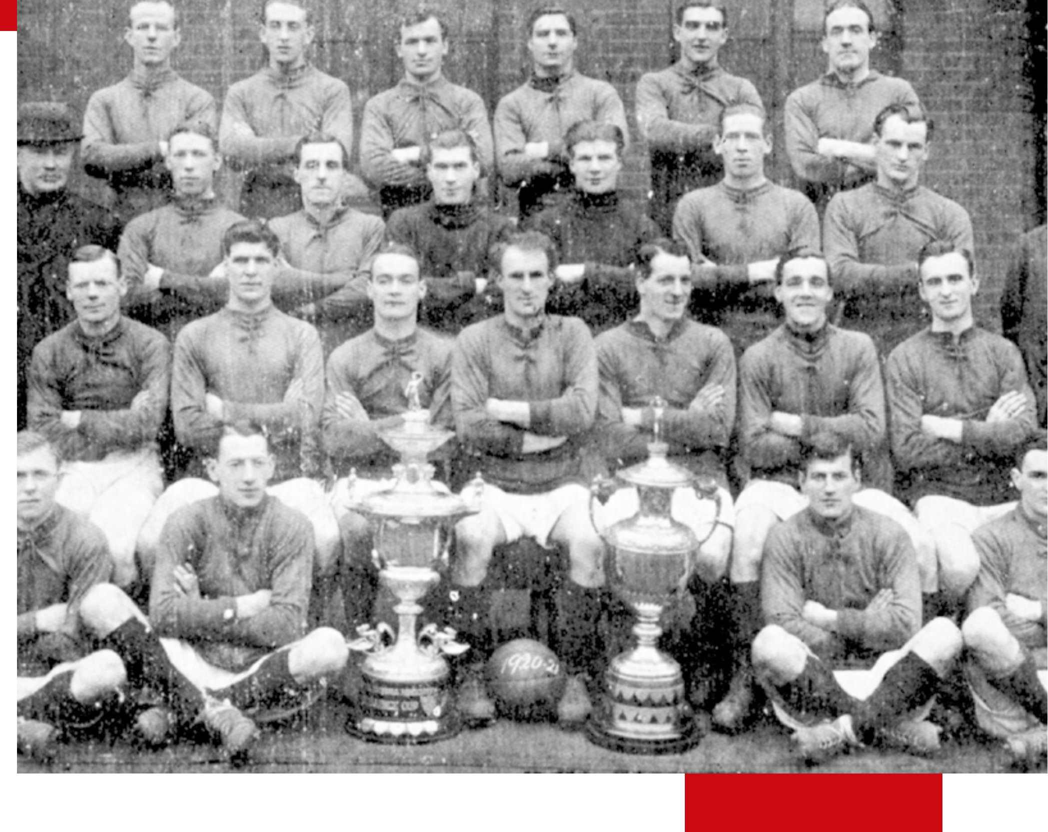
Scott won the first of his 27 international caps in 1920. In the 1921/22 campaign, the goalkeeper, who had just turned 28, missed only three games as the Reds won their first league title for 16 years. The following season he was an ever-present between the sticks as the championship was retained.

Liverpool could never quite emulate those back-to-back title triumphs, but Scott's popularity never waned.

A huge favourite of the crowd at Anfield, he remarkably went on to play beyond his 40th birthday and when he played the last of his 467 games for Liverpool (with 137 clean-sheets) in February







HE HAS THE EYE OF AN EAGLE, THE SWIFT MOVEMENT OF A PANTHER, AND THE CLUTCH OF A VICE WITH THE BALL



1934, he held Liverpool's appearance record, later broken by another legendary figure in Billy Liddell more than 20 years later.

In discussing the art of goalkeeping, he once wrote in a newspaper column: "You must not be too obvious in your methods. Forwards practice all kinds of tricks to disguise their real intention, and goalkeepers must be just as cunning."

Elisha was the foundation on which those great Liverpool triumphs at the start of the 'Roaring Twenties' were built but his popularity was built around his humour as well as his great goalkeeping abilities.

"It would be a sad state of affairs if you couldn't raise a smile sometimes in the course of a match," he said.

"Personally I have had a fair share of chivvying and leg-pulling combined with strenuous football. If, after a difficult shot has beaten you, you are to remark casually: 'I haven't the heart to save that one', you show a spirit which appeals to your opponents and which tends to relieve the disappointment of your team-mates."

Back in January 2013, the 100th anniversary of Scott's Liverpool debut was commemorated by an LFC TV documentary. Almost five years later he was one of 20 important figures from LFC history who featured in the Liverpool Football Club Dream Scene – a unique artwork commemorating the club's 125th anniversary.

ROBBO MY CAREER IN PICTURES

The Liverpool left-back tells his Premier League story through iconic images from nine games

1



QPR 0 HULL CITY 1
16 August 2014

This was my Premier League debut for Hull against QPR. I remember Liam Rosenior got injured the day before the game and then I got the step-up to start instead of being on the bench and, yes, it was a memorable game.

We won 1-0, I think I cleared one off the line and it was a good start to my Hull career. I had only been there a week or two so it was a really good way to settle in and make sure we got our first three points on the board.



2

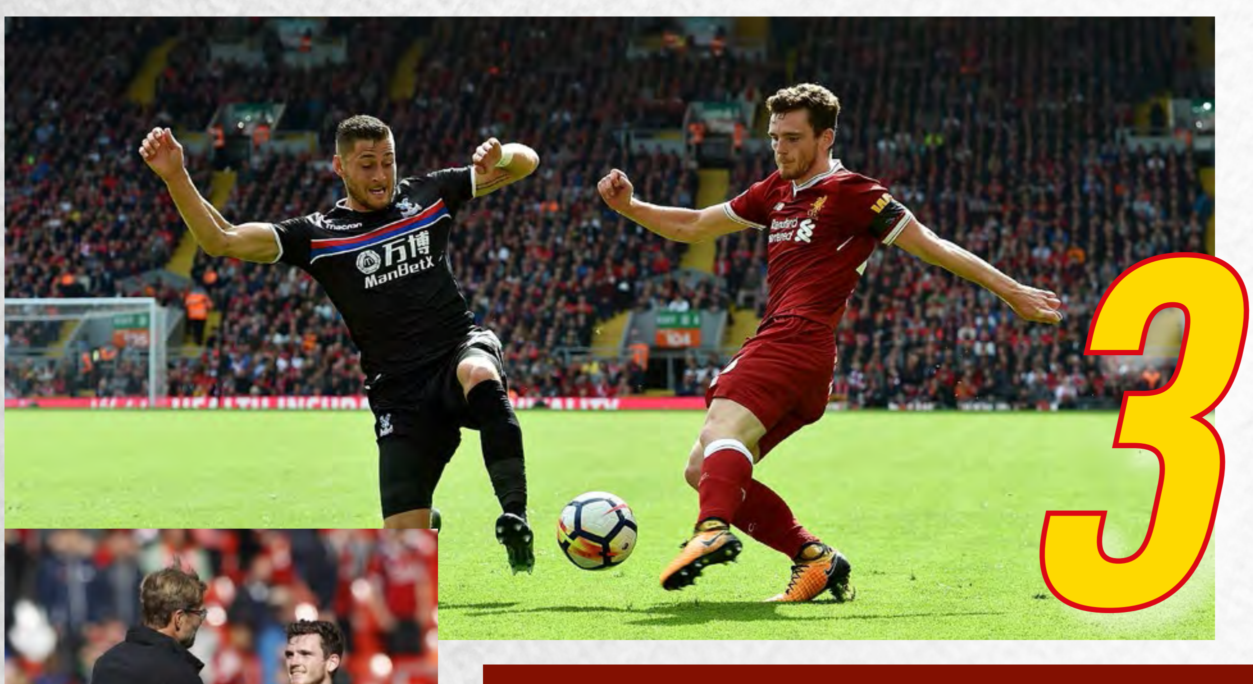
CRYSTAL PALACE 4 HULL CITY 0
14 May 2017

That was the game we got relegated. We lost 4-0 in the end and it was one of my worst games or worst feelings on a football pitch. I think that was my last start for Hull actually and it was one that ended up in disappointment.

We ended up getting going towards the end of that season under [manager] Marco Silva but unfortunately we just fell short and I think that game cemented our place in the Championship for the next season.

I didn't know I was going to Liverpool at that point but it's never nice getting relegated regardless of wherever you're going to be the next season. I'd have loved Hull to have stayed up that season but, like I say, unfortunately we just fell short.





3

LIVERPOOL 1 CRYSTAL PALACE 0
19 August 2017

This was obviously my Liverpool debut. It was the second game of the season at Anfield and I remember it well.

Making your debut in front of all the Liverpool fans was a great feeling and we obviously got the win in the end, so it was a really good day for me and a really proud day. Obviously not many games followed quickly after that for me, but luckily I managed to get in the team not so long after and then I just managed to kick on from there.

At Hull we used to sit back, soak up the pressure, get in a defensive block and try and keep the bigger teams out. Then I was part of that bigger team. I was part of that team that would have maybe 60 or 70 per cent possession in games and attack more but also be switched on to counter-attacks. So it was just trying to get that balance right and it took a bit of time but luckily we got there in the end.

Just adapting to a huge worldwide club like Liverpool takes time in itself but I had a lot of people who could help me and they did, massively. That's probably why I'm still here today.

ROBBO MY CAREER IN PICTURES

4

LIVERPOOL 4
MANCHESTER CITY 3
14 January 2018

Man City at home obviously was an incredible fixture. They were by far the best team in the league that season – they were by miles in front of every other team – and I think they came to us unbeaten.

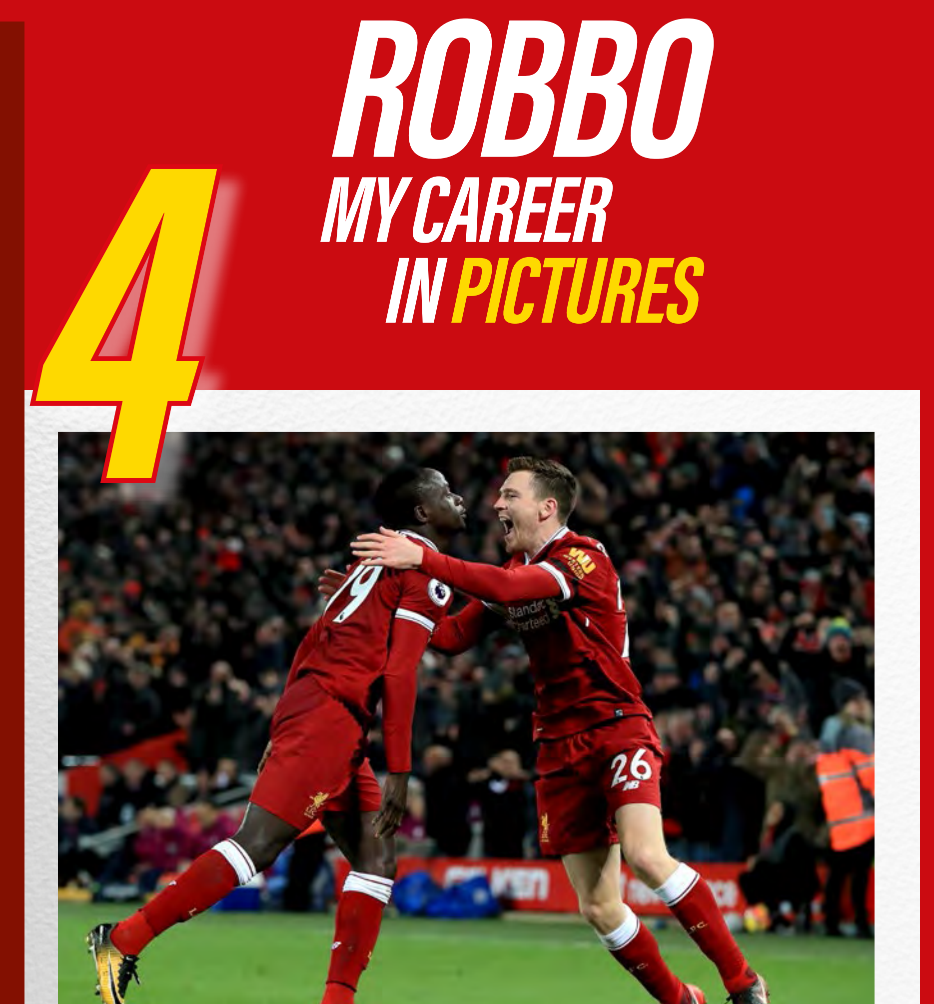
Nobody had managed to take anything off them and obviously we believed that was a big chance for us to put a marker down for the next season – and coming games – and we went out there and put in that fantastic performance and won 4-3.

It was a really memorable game for all of us and fantastic to be part of and probably one of the best atmospheres I've played in front of as well.

We were worthy winners that day. All the boys showed how committed they are. A lot of us did a lot of running that day. There was that video of me closing several City players down in that game which went viral and things like that, but that was just the attitude we went out with to that game. Whoever is closest to the ball goes and presses and unfortunately for me I was closest all the time on that run and I just had to keep going!

We all showed that game, by how much we were running, just how much we wanted to win the game and I think that's why we got the result in the end - because all of us worked so hard for each other.

That's the key to us playing well: all of us working hard and working together. That's usually what our best games are like and that was certainly one of them.



5

LIVERPOOL 3
MANCHESTER UNITED 1
16 December 2018

That was probably up there with my best individual performances. I played really well that game.

I remember it was a big win for us. Obviously there were Jose Mourinho's comments about me after the game too and to hear that off such a top manager was obviously nice. For an opposition manager to say complimentary things about you straight after the game is very rare and quite nice so yes, it was a good game for me and it was a good game for the lads.

We knew we had to win to stay up with City and luckily we managed it.

6

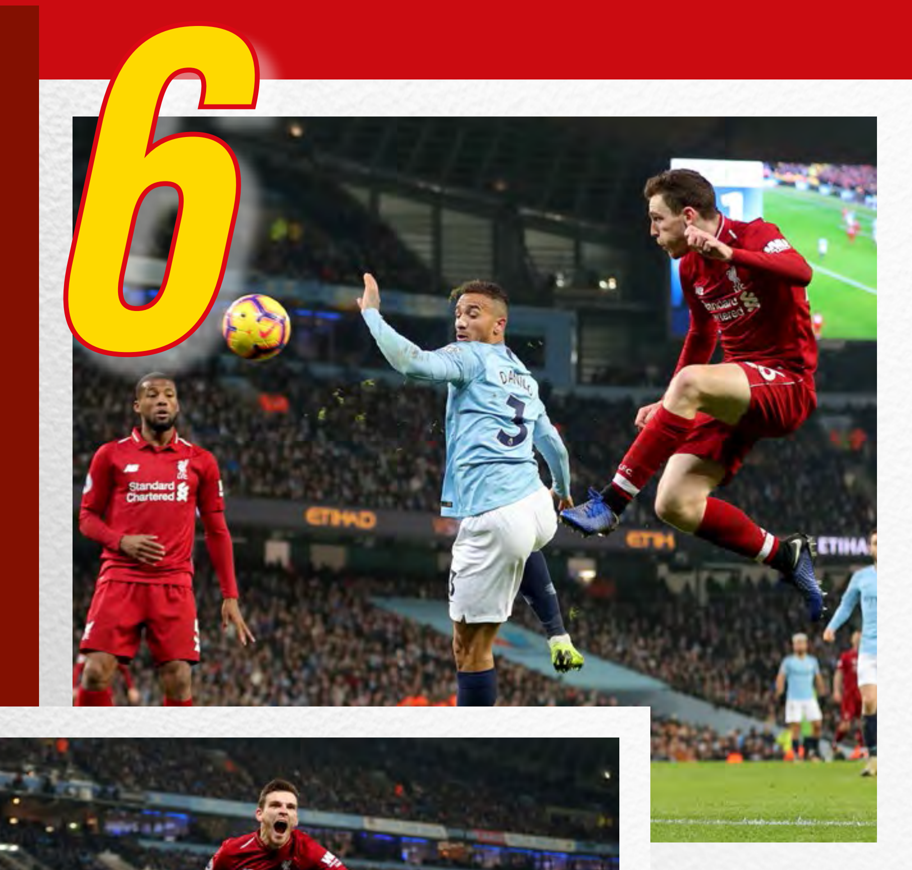
MANCHESTER CITY 2
LIVERPOOL 1
3 January 2019

I think when we scored, we equalised through Bobby Firmino and it went to one-each and we obviously just tried to play a bit better in the second half than we did in the first.

Not once did it cross our minds that this could be the game that we win the league or this or that. We knew that we were playing against a rival and we wanted to try and take as many points as we could, whether that be one or three. Unfortunately we didn't manage it, which was disappointing, and it gave them the momentum to go and do what they did for the rest of the season.

Unfortunately we fell that little bit short but it was one of those things and I don't think that game completely defined our season. Getting beat off Man City away should never define the season.

There were one or two other games where we dropped points too but, all in all, we played a pretty perfect season. It was just that Man City were incredible – and so were we – but they were just that bit better and sometimes you just need to take your hats off to incredible champions and that's what they were that season.



7



ASTON VILLA 1
LIVERPOOL 2
2 November 2019

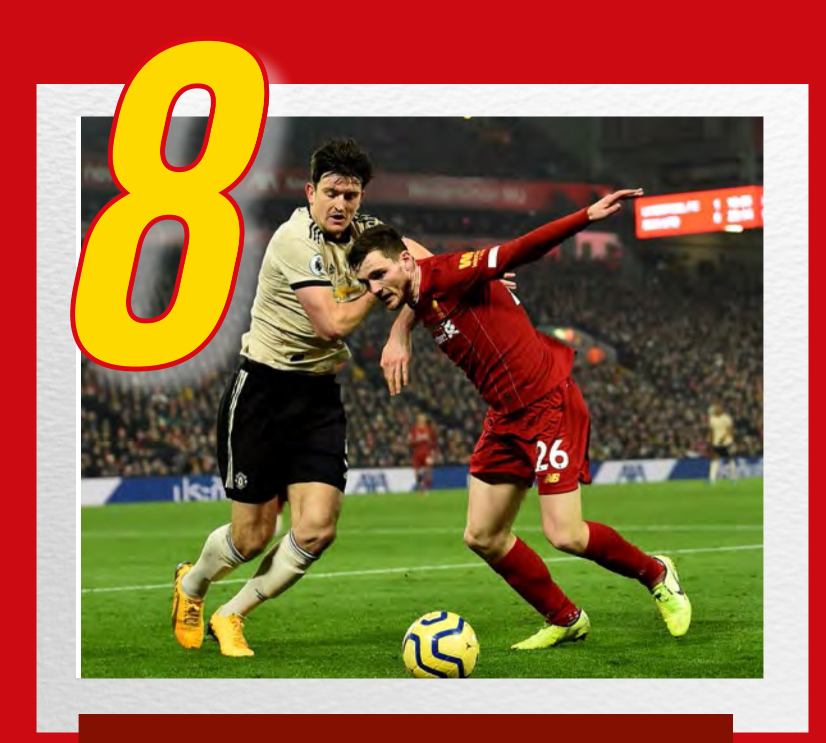
This is definitely one of the favourite goals of my career. It's certainly up there in terms of it being a part of such a big win so late on. It was a massive goal for us and just kept our momentum going and then obviously Sadio managed to score the winner.

It's always a good feeling to be part of a late comeback and when you are able to score a goal, which is pretty rare for me, it was a great feeling. So it was certainly right up there and probably my most important goal, I'd imagine.

Hopefully there are a couple more to come but with that game and with that goal, I'll certainly look back on it with fond and happy memories. It always brings a smile to my face.

ROBBO MY CAREER IN PICTURES

8



LIVERPOOL 2 MANCHESTER UNITED 0
19 January 2020

The atmosphere that day was incredible. Playing against Man United is never an easy game – it's one of your rivals and there is so much history between the two clubs.

After we won that game, I can't remember how many points clear we went but it was significant. The fans certainly believed and we certainly believed as well although, of course, we couldn't show it. But I think that game, hearing the fans singing 'We're going to win the league' and hearing how excited they were getting, it was something that we didn't want to give up. It was something that we wanted to keep, those feelings, and luckily we managed that.

That game was crucial. Obviously Mo scoring late on and securing the win was an incredible moment. It was a massive win for us. We all played really well and it was an incredible night for us.

As I say, the fans were exceptional and that was the night that I think all of them went home and thought: okay, this is the year that we're going to win the league.



9



CHELSEA 2 MANCHESTER CITY 1
25 June 2020

This was the night we were confirmed as Premier League champions and the feeling was one of relief, excitement and happiness! It was everything that came along with it.

Finally the 30-year wait was over and we'd won the league. We were all together [watching the match] – the boys and the staff – and it was an incredible feeling. Man City have been different class the last four or five years and to be able to go ahead in the league against such an exceptional team was so good and to be able to bring a Premier League trophy to Anfield, when I know how much the fans were hurting for it, was an incredible achievement.

It was a special night, of course it was. The fans celebrated it, we celebrated it and rightly so. Like I said, it finally put the 'Champions' sign above us and that's what we were striving for all season.

The first person I hugged was either [Adam] Lallana or Trent. Both of them were sitting right next to me so definitely it would've been one of them. Then all the lads just got in a big group huddle and started jumping about!

You have to enjoy these moments. We know as a club that there had been a 30-year wait, so they don't come round all the time and it's up to us to make sure that wait doesn't go on as long as it did the last time. But in those moments you have to enjoy them and we certainly did that night.

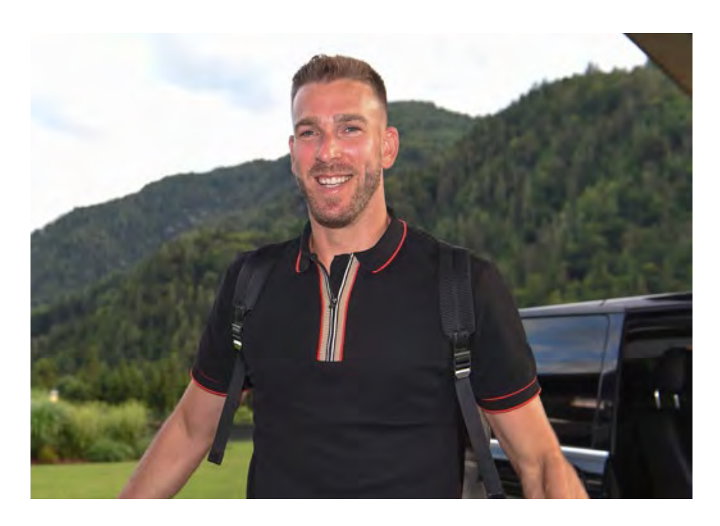


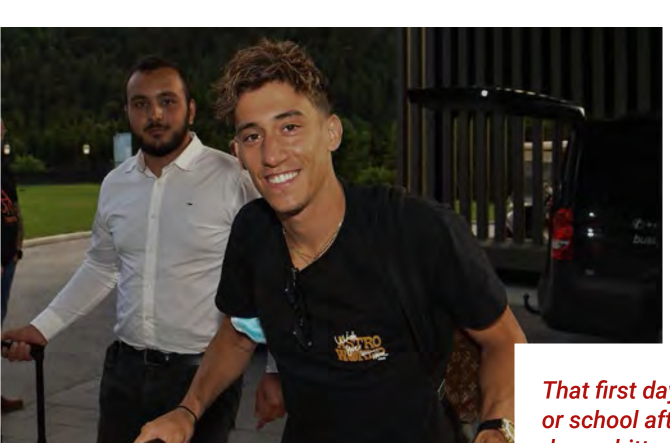
TRAINING
CAMP ON CAMERA

Picturesque settings. Mountain fresh air. And plenty of hard graft. The Reds prepared for season 2021/22 in Austria and France and club photographers John Powell and Andrew Powell were there to capture Jürgen Klopp and his staff putting the lads through their paces...

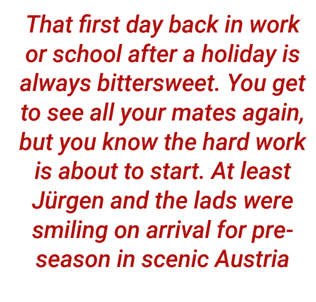






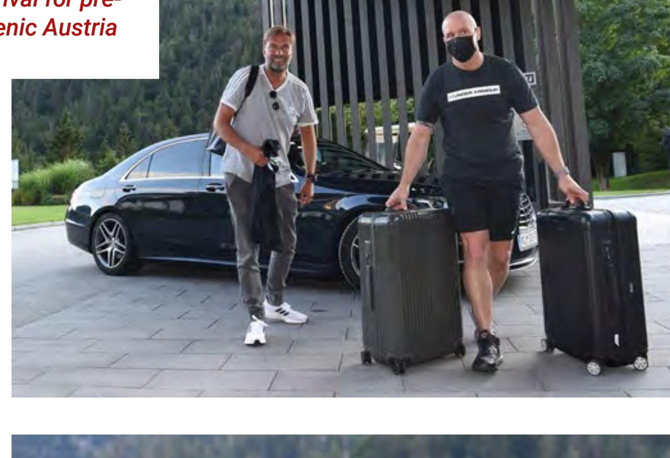




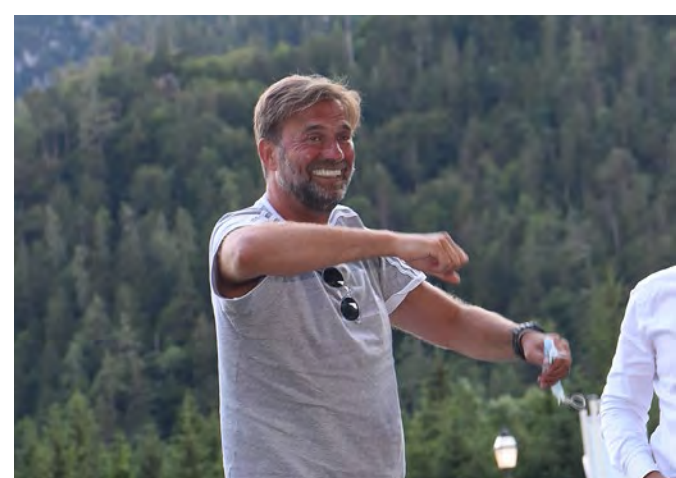


That first day back in work or school after a holiday is always bittersweet. You get to see all your mates again, but you know the hard work is about to start. At least Jürgen and the lads were smiling on arrival for pre-season in scenic Austria









Looks like somebody got a new Liverpool FC phone case on his holidays. But where are Jürgen's glasses?


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Fist bumps from the boss and a tree-mendous setting to be putting the hard pre-season yards in

The Reds are coming up the hill, boys. Hopefully to mount a title challenge. And if you don't like these captions there's summit wrong













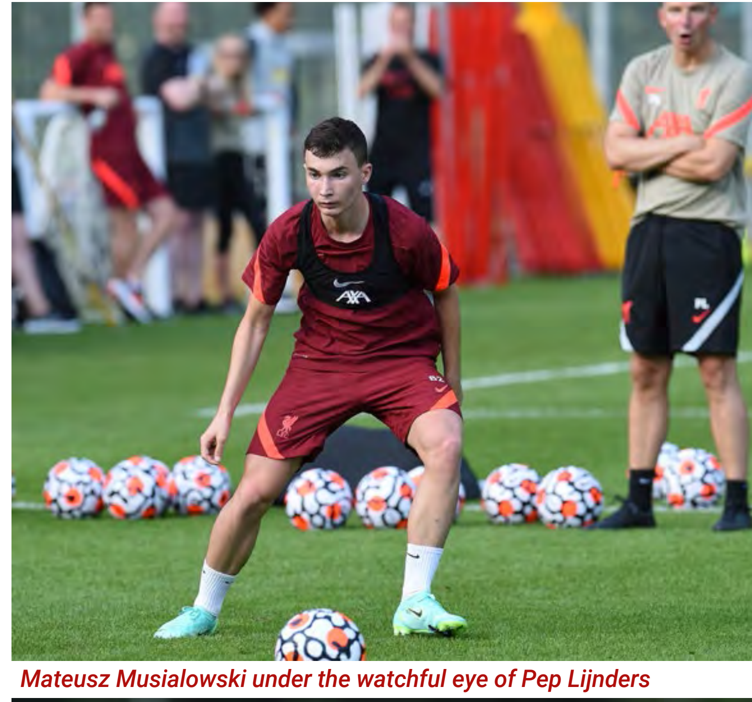
Jurgen Klopp: "It's an intense time, but it's all good. It's the longest pre-season we have together. It's not the longest pre-season of our life, but having them together for four-and-a-half weeks is really rare. In the end when we are back in England, we will be complete and then we have to make sure that we are ready for the first game."







Big Ben Davies clocks into training



Mateusz Musialowski under the watchful eye of Pep Lijnders










"Kaide, how can you say Joel is better at ten-pin bowling than me?"


Even in pre-season, Nat Phillips heads everything





Mo Salah practises his new goal celebration...



"Might need to work on that celebration, Mo..."









Kostas likes it though!

Adrian realises he's forgotten to bring his headphones to the gym







He'll cycle past,
Calm as you like,
He's Virgil van Bike,
He's probably read better captions but here we are



Bronze for Curtis...



Silver for Rhys...



Gold for Virgil. And the peloton don't look happy!







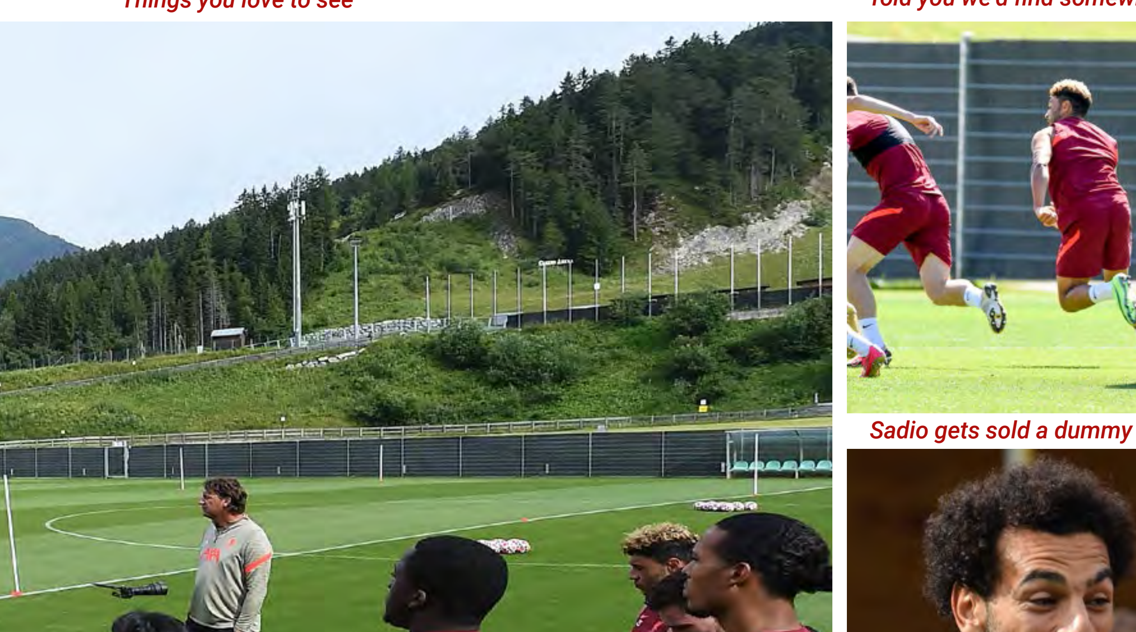
Marcelo Pitaluga and Adrian concentrate on the job in hand, aka 'the ball'



Things you love to see



'Told you we'd find somewhere greener than Yorkshire'





Sadio gets sold a dummy

"Did you miss me, Mo?"



No wonder they won with a 13-man team

Sadio masters Bobby Firmino's favourite emoji









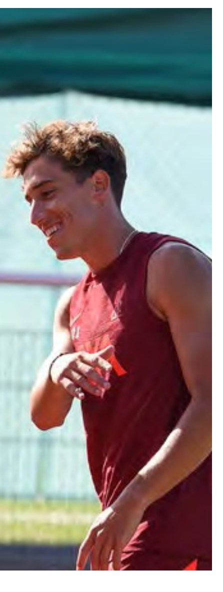
Okay, so we've moved from Austria to France now but the hard work continued and it was good to see the boys from Brazil back













Scousers

v FC Wacker Innsbruck

Tue 20th July 2021 (30 mins) Drew 1-1





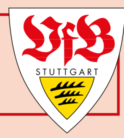






VfB Stuttgart

Tue 20th July 2021 (30 mins) Drew 1-1











FSV Mainz 05



Fri 23rd July (90 mins) Won 1-0









Hertha BSC





Thu 29th July (90 mins) Lost 3-4










MBW
LFC

"It's an exciting group and we're looking forward to this season's challenge"

Under-18s boss Marc Bridge-Wilkinson reflects upon last season's run to the FA Youth Cup final, looks ahead to the new season and explains how emerging talent Kaide Gordon will be managed...

Interview: Chris McLoughlin



Marc, last season was your first as Liverpool U18s manager – how do you look back on it?

It was a positive year. I always look back on the players and whether we saw improvement, and I would like to think individuals showed signs of that. The team performances were nice and in terms of the way we play and the style that we have, it was really positive, really attacking and we caused teams lots of problems.

That was good, but you always look at the individuals and to see how the boys performed in certain moments of certain games. Showing the improvements that they did, that's where I get the most satisfaction and sense of accomplishment.

Your team had a brilliant run to reach the FA Youth Cup final, but it must have been disappointing to be beaten by Aston Villa...

It was tough. We definitely got to the final the hard way, playing Man United, playing Arsenal and playing a good Ipswich side as well, but it was exciting. It gave the boys something to look forward to, to focus on, and it gave them a stage to perform on and show what they're about. I think they did that, but as you rightly say it was disappointing the way we finished.

I was really proud of the way the boys handled different situations. Playing Arsenal at Anfield was tough. We went down to ten men at Man United away and without playing particularly well we managed to see the game through. Ipswich away in the semi-final was difficult, especially in the first half, but we adapted and came through it.

Unfortunately we started the final in a way we didn't want to. We set up to try not to concede an early goal but ended up 2-0 down within about 11 minutes. Again, the pride the lads have in themselves was shown in the last hour when they went at it. We got a goal back and the biggest moment was at the end of the game when Jarell Quansah had a chance to keep us in it. Perhaps at the start you wouldn't have thought that could happen.

The Youth Cup final was also played at Villa Park and the hosts could have fans in...

They had about 5,000 fans in, but it sounded like a lot more. They boys weren't used to it because there had been no crowds before that, so I think it made the crowd even bigger. It took a while for them to get used to it, that's for sure, but it was a great moment for their development.

Although we lost the game and didn't perform to the level that we wanted, to play a game of that stature in a stadium with the history it's got – and the history Aston Villa as a club have – in a final with the fans in there, made it one hell of a development game for the individuals that played.

>>



The UEFA Youth League was cancelled due to COVID-19. How much did that hold the lads back in terms of development and how much are you looking forward to it returning?

In terms of what they missed out on, I haven't been involved in it [previously] either. I've only seen it on TV and witnessed some of the games here in previous years, but it's definitely a great tool in terms of development.

You play against the best European teams with different styles and tactics and from different cultures. You also deal with things like playing in different temperatures and playing on artificial surfaces. They are different challenges that hopefully the boys can benefit from so I'm sure it was a bit of a loss.

In terms of how much, I'm not sure, but it's definitely something I'm looking forward to this season. Some of the boys here will know what they missed out on, but for others it will be a new competition and there is definite excitement to get back into it and play games against some of the best European teams.

The likes of Curtis Jones, Neco Williams and Rhys Williams progressed from Youth League to Champions League. Does that show the lads now there is a route to bigger competitions at LFC?

Yes, but it's all about developing. It's all about putting the boys in pressurised situations. The bigger the competition, the bigger the opponents, the bigger the occasion, the bigger the stress you put on them and the more you learn about them.

They learn to cope with the pressure that comes with it, they learn to adapt and hopefully they are brave enough to play their games.

There are plenty of players who have played top-flight football who haven't played in the Youth League, so it's not the be-all and end-all, but it's a way of us putting them in more pressurised situations.

We're chatting at a time when Jürgen Klopp has taken a number of young players with him to the training camps in Austria and France – how big an opportunity is it for them?

It is a brilliant opportunity – it can never be anything but that – because it is an opportunity to go to show people what you're all about, whether you're 16, 18 or 20. Obviously they are with the first-team coaching staff and players, but with the games being on TV and other bits around it there is an opportunity to showcase who they are.

One player who's caught the eye is Kaide Gordon. How do you manage an exciting 16-year-old player who now has first-team pre-season experience but then returns to Academy football?

It's a good question. I would like to think that the conversations that were had between Alex, myself, other staff and Kaide prior to him going will be important. We said it's an opportunity to show them what you do, but don't think for one minute that you've cracked it and when you come back we fully expect you to come back to us.

We told him to enjoy it and learn as much as he can from the first-team players and staff that perhaps you don't get training with the U18s

WE TOLD KAIDE GORDON TO ENJOY BEING WITH THE SENIOR SQUAD AND LEARN AS MUCH AS HE CAN FROM THE FIRST-TEAM PLAYERS AND STAFF... WHO KNOWS WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN? HE'S WORKING HARD AT HIS GAME

or U23s. Kaide can use it to fast-forward his development. Who knows what might happen? He might stay with the first-team. He might come back to us and we as a staff are prepared for both eventualities.

Kaide has only been at Liverpool for six months – what type of character is he?

He's a confident character. He's not shy on self-belief but not in a bad way. He's got belief in his ability, like we all have, and he's here to become a Liverpool first-team player. That's quite obvious and he goes about his business in a way that he wants to improve. He works hard at his game.

Harvey Davies also went to Austria and last season he was on the bench for three Champions League games. That must be invaluable experience for a young goalkeeper...

Any opportunity to be around first-team players, especially at a club like this, is invaluable. We can't manufacture it in this Academy environment. Hopefully we prepare them in a way that when they go on a tour, are on the bench like Harvey was, or even just go for a training session at the AXA, they learn from that situation.

I'm sure Harvey, Kaide and all the boys who have gone to the training camp are doing that.

How good a group have you got in the U18s this season and do you know most of the lads who have stepped up from your time as U16s manager?

I know them all. Stefan [Bajcetic] is probably the newest one, having come in last season, but he worked with the U18s so I've had three months working with him.

Knowing all the boys when I worked with them for the U15s and U16s has made the transition easier – and hopefully a bit smoother for them as well – because they understand the way I like to do things and the standards that we set.

It's a different group and we can't judge them on last year's group, so it's going to be really important that we find our way. We'll play slightly differently and we'll have to adapt to the players that we have, but it's an exciting group – there's no two ways about it. We're looking forward to the challenge, we're looking forward to the games and getting back into the real thick of it.

Things can change, but with a lot of COVID restrictions lifted now, will it also be good to have parents and other supporters back watching Academy football?

Last season was a strange situation for everybody, but I think it was less of a change for us at this level than it was for the first-team players –



>>

they're used to having 50,000, 60,000 people watching them whereas our boys were missing a couple of hundred. But it was different and they'll relish the opportunity to play in front of whatever amount of fans that we're allowed to have.

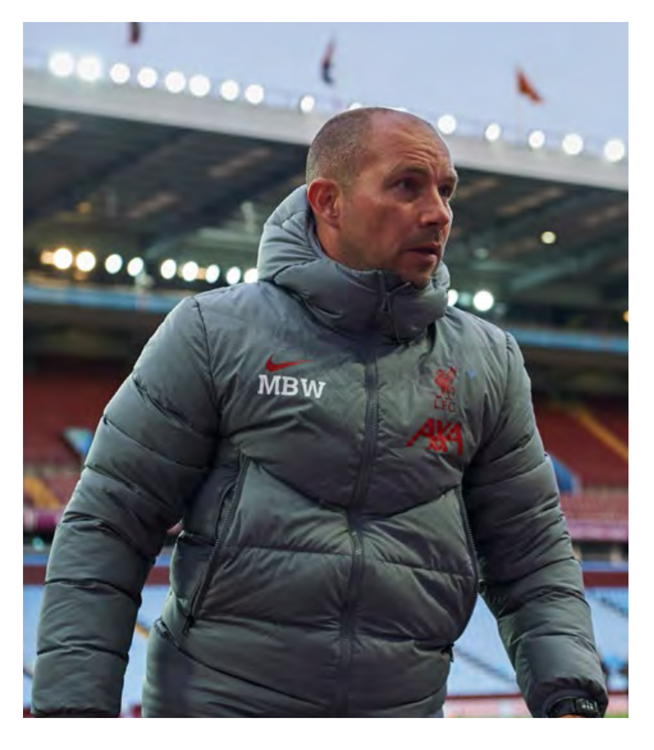
It's definitely exciting and it will be nice for their parents and friends to see them play. We're looking forward to it, that's for sure.

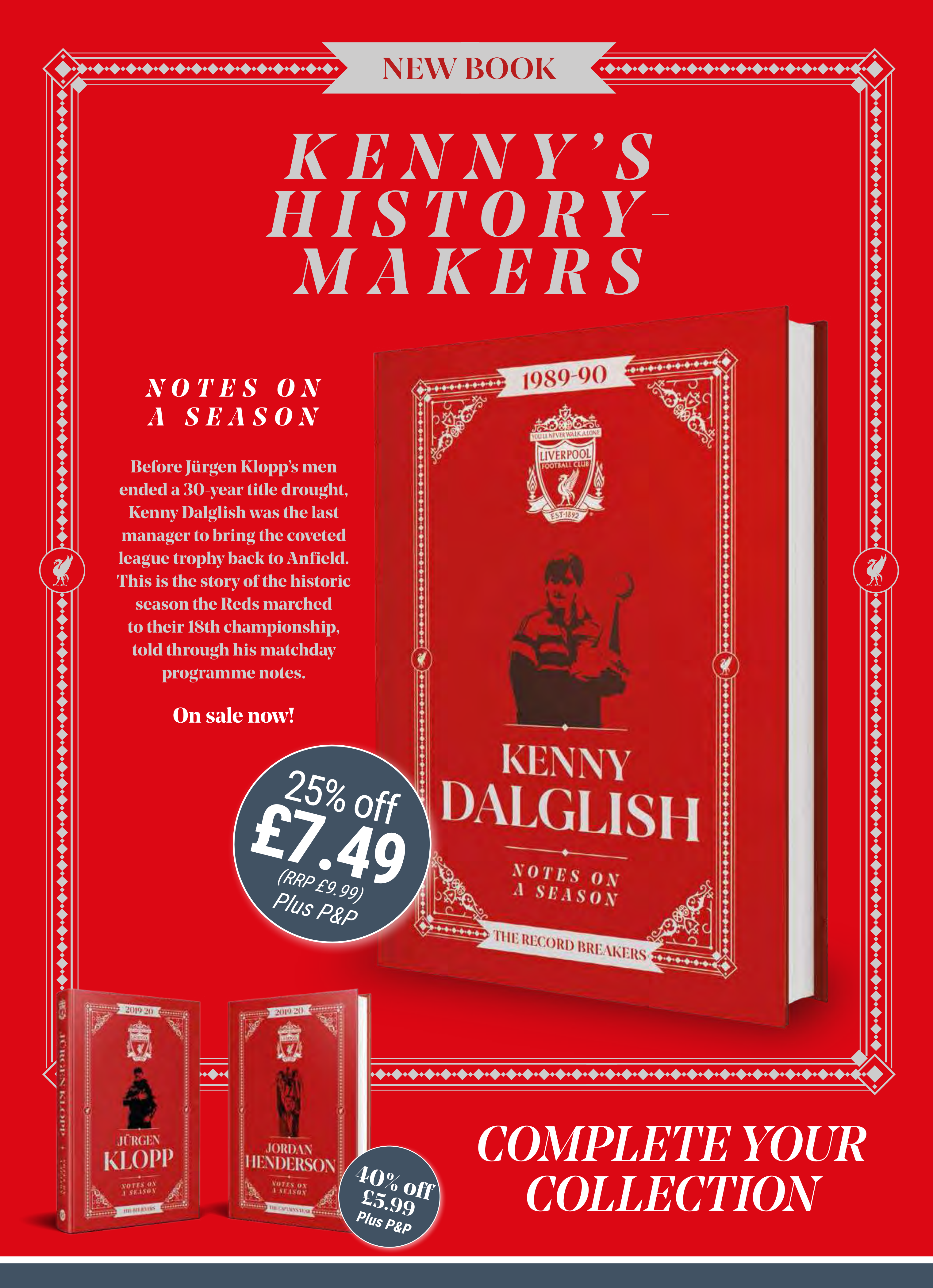
How tricky was it for the lads with the various restrictions and how much are you looking forward to a bit more normality?

The real positive was that the boys were still in and playing football. They were training every day and our programme for the season basically just started a month later.

The restrictions around masks, around social distancing and stuff – we came to accept it quite quickly because ultimately the boys are doing what they dream of doing, which is play football every day. Us as coaches, this is also where we want to be, so I wouldn't say there was any real hardship. We still got to do the thing that we love doing.

The lads adapted to it wonderfully and carried that through the whole season. Now, with restrictions in the Academy building, we're still being very cautious and sensible because I think that's key still moving forward. But yes, we're looking forward to what the next steps bring and playing football home and away, with people watching in stadiums, and life being a bit more normal.





NEW BOOK
KENNY'S HISTORY-MAKERS
NOTES ON A SEASON
Before Jürgen Klopp's men ended a 30-year title drought, Kenny Dalglish was the last manager to bring the coveted league trophy back to Anfield. This is the story of the historic season the Reds marched to their 18th championship, told through his matchday programme notes.
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MAKING MORE MEMORIES

It's an exciting new era for Liverpool FC Women with manager Matt Beard back at the helm and determined to bring more success too as the Reds prepare to challenge for promotion



Interview: William Hughes

Matt, you've been away for six years and gained a lot of experience in that time – are Liverpool FC Women getting an even better manager this time around?
Yes, I definitely think so. The game's evolved in that six years as well with regards to the financial investment in the league, the teams, the set-ups and nowadays you're managing more staff and you've generally got bigger squads.

The experiences of going away to America and learning a different style of football, making new connections and meeting people with different personalities has helped me. In America everything is about winning and over there you would class the teams as 'franchises'.

When I came back here [in 2018] West Ham had jumped up three divisions and so that was a really interesting process and like starting a brand new business – but also at the top level of football, so I learnt a lot from that.

We also had the documentaries in the first two years as well [the BBC behind-the-scenes series *Britain's Youngest Football Boss* featuring Hammers managing director Jack Sullivan]. But I'd like to think that as time has gone on, I've evolved as a manager.

I've had some really different experiences since I've been gone. Going abroad, that process at West Ham, then going to Bristol City for the second half of last season [as maternity cover for manager Tanya Oxtoby] as I'd never been involved in a relegation battle or anything like that before, so that was a learning-curve for me too.

I've definitely come back a different person and I've definitely got more experience. Hopefully I can utilise it to galvanise this group and make sure we are challenging for the Championship title.

Managing in the second tier will also be a new challenge...
Definitely. The great thing for me is that we've got players who have now experienced this division and I've got staff here who have experienced the WSL and the Championship, so I need to draw on both.

We've signed players who have experienced maybe this level but

also the WSL, so I'd like to think we've got the balance right with the recruitment. The biggest thing with that, and with analysing this league, is that we can play in numerous different ways with the personnel we've got. That, combined with the experience that the players had last year, will give us an advantage going forward.

The FA Women's Championship has now expanded to 12 clubs with the additions of Sunderland AFC and Watford and a lot of teams have strengthened this summer…

This is going to be a tough league, a real tough league. Not only have teams strengthened, you've got Lewes, London City Lionesses, Charlton and Coventry United all investing in their infrastructures as well as their squads.

If you go back two years to when Man United were in the Championship, you knew that they would win it. Last year you probably would've said it was between Liverpool and Leicester City. This year you could probably say there are five or six teams that could quite easily challenge to go up. As I say, it just goes to show the investment during the time that I've been away, not only in the top division but now in the Championship too.

It's been interesting looking at who's adding which players. We wanted to get our business done early so that we could work all pre-season to make sure we hit the ground running. It's going to be a fascinating division and really tough, but we're looking forward to the challenge.

London City Lionesses are the first opponents at Prenton Park in late August – are you happy to have a home game to start with?

For me the home game was important because it allows us to play in front of our fans for the first time in a long time. In some ways this is already going to be a six-pointer. I know that may sound a bit daft with it being the first game of the season, but I really do see London City as one of the teams that will threaten us for the title, so it will be a great opportunity for us to get three points under our belts early and off one of our rivals too.

When I came here in 2013 we knew we were building a good team. Did we think we could knock Arsenal off their perch with the dominance they had in women's football for 12 to 15 years? Never in a million years in that first year did I think that would happen. But then we got a win against Lincoln – it was a bit of a scrappy goal which I'll never forget because it was a little Tats Dowie flick-on header – and things went from there. So it's small steps and making sure we take it a game at a time.

How much of a boost will it be for yourself and the players to be able to play in front of the supporters again?

We are really looking forward to it. It will be good for me to see some familiar faces and when I got announced as the manager again, I had a few people get in touch through social media.

This is a great club, it's a unique club. I'm so happy to be back and I can't wait to see the fans again and hopefully we can make some more great memories together.

You mention a number of the players having experienced the Championship last season along with your assistant, Amber Whiteley, as first-team coach and interim-manager too…

It's vitally important. I've been really impressed with Amber since I've come in. She's a great personality, a very good coach and she knows the game. We've started off well and have a great relationship.

But it's not about me, it's not about Amber – it's about lots of people such as David [Robshaw, physical performance coach] and Hina [Chauhan, physiotherapist] as an example, who are working every hour God sends. It's about what everyone does collectively.

Yes, I might have the final decision on picking the team and who goes and who comes in, but we all work together. I know a lot of people say it, but you can't run a football club on your own and you can't run a team on your own – you need good staff around you and everyone brings their own strengths.

Joe Potts has also returned as goalkeeping coach and fans will have fond memories of his work during his first spell with the club…

Trigger! Pottsy's a top man. I sort of threw him in at the deep end as he was only 21 when he got the job with us the first time round. He's nine years down the line now at 30 years old.

He's gone away and had different roles since leaving Liverpool, such as working with the England women's set-up, and he's also



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worked in academy football and senior football. So from our perspective Joe's come back in a similar way to me with different experiences.

The one key thing is that we both love this club and we both love this team and from my viewpoint to have Pottsy back is fantastic.

Other links to your first spell here are goalkeeper Rachael Laws and forward Ash Hodson, now on the brink of beating Gemma Bonner's LFC appearance record...

Ash has got a great personality – she always looks like she's up to no good! She's just coming back into training after the hamstring injury she had at the back-end of last year and she did really well in our inter-squad training game last month.

It's important that, one, she knows the club, and two, she's got that experience now and is still relatively young. It's important that we have homegrown players who know what it means to represent Liverpool Football Club.

Then Lawsy was part of that title-winning team in 2013 and she's gone away, been at Reading and come back here. It's great to work with people that you've worked with before.



Youngsters such as Hannah Silcock, Evie Smith and Lucy Parry have impressed in pre-season

Could any of the younger players who have impressed during pre-season be pushing for a place in the squad?

Yes there's a few, to be fair. I've been really impressed with Lucy Parry and Evie Smith. Hannah Silcock has been in, too. She's only 16 and she has applied herself really well.

We utilised a few of the girls from the Under-21s in the in-house training match and some impressed me on that day. So there are three or four here that are good young players and we are giving them the opportunities.

Evie, Hannah and Lucy are training with us every day at the moment and it's great to see them come out of their shells a bit too. Evie Smith, for example, is someone who I think has got great potential. I'm really excited to see how she can develop over the course of the next couple of months and hopefully win herself a contract.

Meikayla Moore has been away at the Olympics with New Zealand. Will she be back and available for the first game of the campaign?

We hope so. After the Olympics we had to sort her visa out again and she was delayed coming back because of that, but the good thing is that she's match-fit, having played the three games for her national team in the competition. She's been training with them too. She's had to play a little bit of catch-up, of course, but we were looking forward to getting her back in.

Rinsola Babajide moved out on loan to Brighton last month – what were the reasons behind that?

Rinsola wanted to be closer to home and she wanted to play in the WSL. We had some good conversations. I don't really know what happened last year but, at the end of the day, I want players who want to help get the team up and want to be here.

Rinsola has been great for the club and she's a very talented player, of course. But at the same time, I've moved away and I know how difficult it is sometimes to be away from your family. So we sat down and made the decision which is best for her and best for the football





club and we wish her all the best at Brighton this year – I'm glad that she is playing in the WSL and not in our division!

Sometimes you've got to think of a person rather than the player.

Fans are keen that the women's side rise again, if you like, after some external criticism recently – are you happy with the backing you have?

I don't think this team or club would've gone down into the Championship if they had got to finish the 2019/20 season. Of course, no-one will ever know what would've happened.

I came back here was because it is a club that is close to my heart and my family and I really had a good time living in the North West. And I would love to be the one that could help us get back to the WSL.

With regards to the backing, Susan Black [executive director of LFC Women] has been fantastic and I'm excited for the future and the direction we're going in. I really do feel that if we can get back up, the sky's our limit.

This is an exciting project and it will be an exciting journey. Over my last seven years in football, I've gone to clubs where I've had to start again. When I first came here in 2012, we made 13 changes to the squad but we had success after that.

When I went to Boston, I had to completely rip it up and start again. I went to West Ham and it was effectively a brand new franchise. I said to my wife, 'I wonder if I'll need to do that again?' But I didn't.

We've got a good core group of players. We've added, in my opinion, some established, talented, young and experienced WSL players on top of a group that are hungry to prove people wrong after last year. So for me and my family it was a no-brainer.

I'm really excited for the season ahead and I'm really excited for the future of the club.



CATCH THE MATCH

LFC WOMEN FA WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP FIXTURES 2021/22

August	
28/29	London City (H)
September	
4/5	Watford (A)
11/12	Bristol City (H)
25/26	Crystal Palace (H)
October	
2/3	Coventry United (A)
9/10	Sheffield United (A)
30/31	Lewes (H)
November	
6/7	Blackburn Rovers (H)
13/14	Durham (A)
20/21	Sunderland AFC (A)
December	
11/12	Charlton Athletic (H)
January	
8/9	Blackburn Rovers (A)
15/16	Watford (H)
22/23	Crystal Palace (A)
February	
5/6	Coventry United (H)
12/13	Sunderland (H)
March	
5/6	London City (A)
12/13	Sunderland AFC (H)
April	
2/3	Bristol City (A)
23/24	Sheffield United (H)
April/May	
30/1	Lewes (A)

Season tickets can now be purchased at liverpoolfc.com. They are priced: adults £60, child £35, adult and child £75, family ticket (two adults and two children) £140, concessions (over 65s and students) £35, young adult £35.

LFC WOMEN SQUAD 2021/22

GOALKEEPERS
1 Rachael Laws
13 Rylee Foster



DEFENDERS
5 Niamh Fahey (club captain)
3 Leighanne Robe
4 Rhiannon Roberts
12 Taylor Hinds
15 Meikayla Moore
28 Megan Campbell
6 Jasmine Matthews
32 Lucy Parry
34 Hannah Silcock
17 Carla Humphrey
33 Evie Smith

MIDFIELDER
10 Rachel Furness (vice-captain)
8 Jade Bailey
7 Missy Bo Kearns
18 Ceri Holland

ATTACKERS
14 Ashley Hodson
11 Melissa Lawley
9 Leanne Kiernan
20 Yana Daniels
19 Rianna Dean

AUG/SEPT

WHAT'S ON



THE BIG KICK-OFF

Get ready for nine months of thrills and spills - the Premier League is back!

Following the friendlies against Athletic Bilbao and Osasuna, the Reds return to Anfield on Saturday 21 August when Burnley will be the first visitors of the 2021/22 league season.

The Clarets are set to be the first team that Liverpool will host in front of a capacity crowd in Premier League action since March 2020. A week later, Thomas Tuchel and his UEFA Champions League-winning Chelsea team will be the visitors.

Jürgen Klopp's men are aiming to improve on the 0-1 home reverses they suffered at the hands of both teams last season.

It all kicks off, of course, on Saturday 14 August when Liverpool make the long trip to Carrow Road hoping to get off to a winning start against Daniel Farke's Norwich City in a tea-time kick-off.

Fans will also be keeping a keen eye on the transfer activity around the Reds and their rivals with the summer window set to close at 11pm on Tuesday 31 August.


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AUG/SEP

WHAT'S ON



UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE DRAW

The draw for the group stages of this season's UEFA Champions League will take place at 11am on Thursday 26 August. The Reds will discover the identity of their three opponents as they prepare to begin their bid for a seventh success in the competition.

The 2021/22 final will take place in Saint Petersburg. The distinct venue on Krestovsky Island was designed by Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa, whose vision was for a spaceship that had landed on the shores of the Gulf of Finland. The spectacular stadium has been home to FC Zenit since 2017.

ALL THOSE YEARS AGO...

ANNIVERSARIES

55 years since a Roger Hunt goal won the FA Charity Shield v Everton on 13 August 1966.
44 years since Kenny Dalglish joined Liverpool from Celtic on 10 August 1977.
15 years since the Reds defeated Chelsea 2-1 to win the Charity Shield at Cardiff on 13 August 2006.
50 years since PA announcer George Sephton made his debut as the 'Voice of Anfield' on 14 August 1971.
17 years since Xabi Alonso and Luis Garcia joined Liverpool on 20 August 2004.
2 years since Jordan Henderson captained the Reds for the 100th time on 24 August 2019.
20 years since the Reds won the UEFA Super Cup for the second time, beating Bayern Munich 3-2 on 24 August 2001.
60 years since Ian St John scored his first LFC goal on 30 August 1961.

And it's 50 years since Kevin Keegan scored on his Liverpool FC debut on 14 August 1971...

It's incredible to think it is now half-a-century since Kevin Keegan burst onto the scene at Anfield.

The 20-year-old striker had been signed from Scunthorpe in May 1971 and it was expected that he would take the time-honoured route through the reserves.

However, manager Bill Shankly had been so impressed by the youngster in pre-season training that he selected him for the first team in their traditional late-summer, full-scale practice match against the reserves at Melwood.

Shankly later recalled: "Normally our reserve team gives the senior side a tough time but in this instance the seniors won easily. I asked Ian Ross, the second team skipper, what had happened and he pointed to Keegan and said: 'He made all the difference'."

Handed the no7 shirt for the curtain-raiser against Nottingham Forest at Anfield, and announced to the Anfield crowd for the first time by a certain George Sephton, the dynamic youngster was not about to give it up lightly. Inside the first 16 minutes he had scored a goal and also won a penalty.

"The pace was terrific and I had to take an occasional two-minute breather, but the other lads helped me out tremendously," Keegan admitted to reporters after the Reds' 3-1 win.

Shankly was also in no mood to play down the promise of his young forward: "What a performance by Keegan – this lad's got all the confidence in the world."

The *Liverpool Echo* match report also picked up the sense of expectation in the air. It signed off: "The Liverpool fans have a new hero to cheer and the anticipation of a season full of possibilities."



BIRTHDAYS

Joel Matip 30 on 8 August
Djibril Cisse 40 on 12 August
Rylee Foster 23 on 13 August
Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain 28 on 15 August
Bolo Zenden 45 on 15 August
Barry Venison 57 on 16 August
Steve McMahon 60 on 20 August
Michael Thomas 54 on 24 August
Didi Hamann 48 on 27 August
Pepe Reina 39 on 31 August
Rhiannon Roberts 31 on 30 August
Alan Kennedy 67 on 31 August



WHAT'S IN

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£30

MENS RED ZIP THROUGH HOODY
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JUNIOR RED ZIP THROUGH HOODY
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JUNIOR RED LIVERBIRD TEE
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JUST A SELECTION OF LIVERPOOL FC MATCHDAY ESSENTIALS FOR SEASON 2021/22



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WOMEN'S CREST SCARF
£12





MENS GREY MARL RAISED PRINT TEE
£22



WOMEN'S BLACK TIA TEE
£19.95

FIXTURES 2021/22

		SCORE	TV	SCORERS
AUGUST				
Sat 14	Norwich City (A, 5.30pm)		Sky	
Sat 21	**Burnley (H, 12.30pm)**		**BT**	
Sat 28	Chelsea (H, 5.30pm)		Sky	
SEPTEMBER				
Sun 12	Leeds United (A, 4.30pm)		Sky	
Tue 14/Wed 15	UCL Matchday One			
Sat 18	**Crystal Palace (H)**			
Wed 22	Carabao Cup 3			
Sat 25	Brentford (A, 5.30pm)		Sky	
Tue 28/Wed 29	UCL Matchday Two			
OCTOBER				
Sat 2	**Manchester City (H)**			
Sat 16	Watford (A)			
Tue 19/Wed 20	UCL Matchday Three			
Sat 23	Manchester United (A)			
Wed 27	Carabao Cup 4			
Sat 30	**Brighton & Hove Albion (H)**			
NOVEMBER				
Tue 2/Wed 3	UCL Matchday Four			
Sat 6	West Ham United (A)			
Sat 20	**Arsenal (H)**			
Tue 23/Wed 24	UCL Matchday Five			
Sat 27	**Southampton (H)**			
Tue 30	Everton (A)			
DECEMBER				
Sat 4	Wolverhampton Wanderers (A)			
Tue 7/Wed 8	UCL Matchday Six			
Sat 11	**Aston Villa (H)**			
Wed 15	**Newcastle United (H)**			
Sat 18	Tottenham Hotspur (A)			
Wed 22	Carabao Cup 5			
Sun 26	**Leeds United (H)**			
Tue 28	Leicester City (A)			
JANUARY				
Sat 1	Chelsea (A)			
Wed 5	Carabao Cup S-F 1			
Sat 8	Emirates FA Cup 3			
Wed 12	Carabao Cup S-F 2			
Sat 15	**Brentford (H)**			
Sat 22	Crystal Palace (A)			
FEBRUARY				
Sat 5	Emirates FA Cup 4			
Wed 9	**Leicester City (H)**			
Sat 12	Burnley (A)			
Tue 15/Wed 16	UCL Ro16 1			
Sat 19	**Norwich City (H)**			
Tue 22/Wed 23	UCL Ro16 1			
Sat 26	Arsenal (A)			
Sun 27	Carabao Cup Final			
MARCH				
Wed 2	Emirates FA Cup 5			
Sat 5	**West Ham United (H)**			
Tue 8/Wed 9	UCL Ro16 2			
Sat 12	Brighton & Hove Albion (A)			
Tue 15/Wed 16	UCL Ro16 2			
Sat 19	**Manchester United (H)**			
Sat 19	Emirates FA Cup 6			
APRIL				
Sat 2	**Watford (H)**			
Tue 5/Wed 6	UCL Q-F 1			
Sat 9	Manchester City (A)			
Tue 12/Wed 13	UCL Q-F 2			
Sat 16	Aston Villa (A)			
Sat 16	Emirates FA Cup S-F			
Sat 23	**Everton (H)**			
Tue 26/Wed 27	UCL S-F 1			
Sat 30	Newcastle United (A)			
MAY				
Tue 3/Wed 4	UCL S-F 2			
Sat 7	**Tottenham Hotspur (H)**			
Sat 14	Emirates FA Cup Final			
Sun 15	Southampton (A)			
Sun 22	**Wolverhampton Wanderers (H)**			
Sat 28	UCL Final			

All fixtures are subject to change.

L.F.C.









NEIL MELLOR

The squad have shown the manager with their pre-season performances that he doesn't need to bring anyone in

Liverpool start the Premier League season afresh and can take the momentum they built to finish third into the new campaign. Securing qualification to the Champions League was huge because mentally it would have been tougher to start in the Europa League.

Fabinho's return to midfield made a big difference as it helped the balance of the team. We saw more of Thiago, which in turn helped the front-three, and they were more clinical in front of goal.

The fact that Fabinho, Alisson, Roberto Firmino and Jordan Henderson have missed most of pre-season, however, is not ideal for Jürgen Klopp. It has to be hoped their lack of recovery and preparation doesn't affect Liverpool too much in the opening weeks of the season.

On the flip-side, it is a bonus to have some key players back from injury and both Mo Salah and Sadio Mane having a full pre-season. I'm expecting Mane to have a big year.

Mane's numbers were lower last season – he performed well, but wasn't as clinical – and I think he'll come roaring back to prove a few critics wrong. He is a top-class striker and will want to show that last season doesn't reflect how good he is.

The hunger I've seen in him during pre-season reminds me of what I saw from Salah last year after he missed out on the Golden Boot. I fancy Mane to get a big number of goals this season.

Firmino has been brilliant for both Mane and Salah. He plays the number nine role so well, but if he isn't ready to start the season then it looks like either Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain or Takumi Minamino will come in. Liverpool will always create chances with Mane and Salah in the side, but I also expect a more attacking midfield role to be utilised.

Harvey Elliott and Naby Keita have played there during pre-season and I've been impressed with Elliott. He played 41 times for Blackburn in the Championship last season, had a brilliant record for goals and assists and was really influential.

He has returned a maturer player who can handle being around the senior Liverpool players. There is also maturity in his play and while a role in the midfield three is unfamiliar to him, he's adapted brilliantly. He picks up second-balls, he creates chances, he looks after the ball and he defends.

For me, Harvey has shown he is capable and can be trusted in that role, which is incredible for an 18-year-old. It also makes me question whether Liverpool actually need to sign another midfielder.

Jordan Henderson, Fabinho, Thiago, Keita, James Milner, Oxlade-Chamberlain, Curtis Jones and now Elliott. That's eight midfielders for three positions so who comes in?

There are enough players hovering around the fringes and I think the squad have shown the manager with their pre-season performances that he doesn't need to bring anyone in. Liverpool don't need a new 10-goal midfielder. If Keita, Jones and Elliott can contribute five-apiece then that's the lack of goals from midfield issue resolved.

In Kaide Gordon, we also have another exciting prospect who might benefit from a Harvey Elliott-style loan move. He's only 16 but Kaide has impressed me in pre-season, particularly with his confidence and ability to be involved. Young players often stay on the fringes of games, but Gordon could've had a hat-trick against Hertha Berlin. If I was managing a Championship club I'd be trying to get him on loan.

He will benefit from training with Liverpool's first-team, but at some point there might be a decision to make. I think he's ready to play in the Championship. Game time at that level could benefit him in the same way it has helped Elliott. Players all develop differently – Harvey aided his development with a loan, Curtis helped his development training with the first-team. I will be interested to see what is decided for Kaide Gordon.

In terms of the bigger picture, I think Liverpool will be right in the mix to win the Premier League. The Reds are genuine title contenders because of their talent, their mentality and having the fans back at Anfield will make a huge difference.

Man City are the team to beat and Chelsea will be stronger, but neither have finished their business. Even if expensive, big names come in, it can take time to gel whereas Liverpool have a settled team and I think Klopp's men will have a right go at winning the title again.



• Follow Neil on Twitter @NeilMellor33

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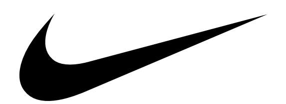
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